



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



FRIDAY — 18 Nov 2022

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HEADLINE	11/18 US imposes new sanctions targeting Iran
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/11/18/Iran-petrochemical-sale-sanctions/8631668746007/

<p>GIST</p>	<p>Nov. 18 (UPI) -- For a third straight day, the United States has imposed sanctions targeting Iran, as the Biden administration continues to punish the Middle Eastern country over its attempts to evade sanctions and its ongoing crackdown on anti-regime protests.</p> <p>The Treasury and State Department on Thursday blacklisted 13 companies based in China, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates on accusations of facilitating the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of Iranian petrochemical and petroleum products to East Asian buyers on behalf of U.S. designated entities.</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday's designations aim to disrupt Iran's sanctions evasion efforts by targeting companies involved with previously sanctioned Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Commercial, Triliance Petrochemical and the National Iranian Oil Company and its marketing arm, Naftiran Intertrade Company.</p> <p>"The entities targeted today have purchased or enabled Iranian petrochemical and petroleum sales and transferred funds to benefit Iran's petrochemical sector," the United States' top diplomat said in a statement. "The United States is committed to enforcing our sanctions against Iran, including those related to the petroleum and petrochemical trade.</p> <p>"Anyone involved in facilitating these sales and transactions risks exposure to U.S. sanctions."</p> <p>The sanctions freeze all U.S. property and interests in property the designated entities may have as well as bars U.S. citizens from doing business with them.</p> <p>"Today's action further demonstrates the complex sanctions evasion methods Iran employs to illicitly sell petroleum and petrochemical products," Brian Nelson, under secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, said in a statement.</p> <p>The sanctions come as the Biden administration has sought to force Tehran back into negotiations on a new accord aimed at preventing the Islamic Republic from gaining a nuclear weapon.</p> <p>The Biden administration has repeatedly imposed sanctions targeting Iran's efforts to evade previously imposed sanctions, including twice this month alone.</p> <p>It has also recently imposed Iran-related punitive measures against those it accuses of aiding Russia's war in Ukraine with arming the Kremlin with drones and individuals and entities committing human rights abuses against anti-regime protesters in the country, who have taken to the streets since the death of a woman in police custody in mid-September.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Biden administration sanctioned senior officials and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting over the airing of hundreds of forced confessions of Iranian, dual national and international detainees in Iran.</p> <p>On Tuesday, it sanctioned several companies involved in Iran's production of drones for Russia.</p>
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<p>HEADLINE</p>	<p>11/17 Study: indoor humidity level link to Covid</p>
<p>SOURCE</p>	<p>https://www.newsmax.com/health/health-news/covid-transmission-outcomes/2022/11/17/id/1096934/</p>
<p>GIST</p>	<p>A new study found that very dry or very humid indoor air can worsen COVID-19 outcomes. Previous research has shown that proper ventilation can slow the spread of the virus, and now researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have discovered that indoor relative humidity may also influence transmission of the virus.</p> <p>According to MIT News, relative humidity is the amount of moisture in the air compared to the total moisture the air can hold at a given temperature before saturating and forming condensation. In</p>

a [study](#) published Wednesday in the Journal of the Royal Society Interface, the MIT team reported that maintaining an indoor relative humidity level between 40% and 60% is linked to lower rates of COVID-19 infection and deaths, while indoor conditions outside this range are associated with worse COVID-19 outcomes. Most people are comfortable with between 30% and 50% relative humidity, and airplane cabins operate with 20% relative humidity, to give the percentages perspective.

“There’s a protective effect of this intermediate indoor relative humidity,” says lead author Connor Verheyen, a Ph.D. student in medical engineering and medical physics at the Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology.

The researchers analyzed data of COVID-19 prevalence and meteorological measurements from 121 countries, from January 2020 through August 2020, and found a strong correlation between regional outbreaks and relative humidity. For each country they also tracked local COVID-19 measures such as isolation, quarantine, and testing measures along with statistical association with COVID-19 symptoms.

While much of the research on COVID-19 transmission has been focused on the virus’ virulent swings with the seasons, the MIT team noted that most societies spend 90% of their time indoors, where most transmissions occur. Indoor conditions can be very different from outdoor conditions because of climate control systems such as heaters that can significantly dry out indoor air.

The researchers measured both outdoor and indoor humidity in different hemispheres, noting that in the tropics, relative humidity was about the same indoors and outdoors throughout the year. However, during that region’s summer season, when high outdoor humidity raised the indoor humidity over 60%, that rise mirrored the gradual increase in COVID-19 deaths in the tropics.

“We saw more COVID-19 deaths on the low and high end of relative humidity, and less in the sweet spot of 40 to 60 percent,” said Verheyen. “This intermediate relative humidity window is associated with a better outcome, meaning fewer deaths and a deceleration of the pandemic.”

The team’s follow-up studies suggest that pathogens may survive longer in repository droplets in both very dry and very humid conditions. Monitoring indoor relative humidity may give us another valuable mitigation tool along with proper ventilation, the experts concluded.

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HEADLINE	11/17 China, India shift stance Russia war?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/nato-g-20-summit-china-indonesia-india-5ec464cb624b46d0cca9bcbb0c08371f
GIST	<p>NUSA DUA, Indonesia (AP) — China and India, after months of refusing to condemn Russia’s war in Ukraine, did not stand in the way of the release this week of a statement by the world’s leading economies that strongly criticizes Moscow.</p> <p>Could this, at last, signal a bold new policy change by Beijing and New Delhi to align themselves with what the United States and its allies believe is the best way to end a war that has brought death and misery to Ukraine and disrupted millions of lives as food and energy prices soar and economies crack?</p> <p>There’s certainly an eagerness by a world weary of war to see it as the beginning of a shift by the burgeoning global powers.</p> <p>Look close enough, however, and there’s enough subtlety, not to mention spots of vagueness, in both the official statement released at the end of the Group of 20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, and in actions from China and India themselves, to raise questions about whether a real change is underway.</p> <p>Their positions will become clearer in coming weeks, but for now both nations, which have significant trade ties with Russia and have so far stopped short of outright criticism of the war, may simply be looking out for their own interests and keeping future options open.</p>

Figuring out what exactly happened in Bali matters because there's growing worry that without political and diplomatic pressure by China and India, Russia will be far less likely to end its war.

The conflict in Ukraine loomed large over the two-day summit on Bali, which was attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. News early Wednesday of an explosion that rocked eastern Poland prompted U.S. President Joe Biden to hastily arrange an emergency meeting with Group of Seven and NATO members at the summit.

The backroom wrangling at the G-20 over how to address Russia's invasion in its statement was "very, very tough," summit host Indonesian President Joko Widodo said.

"Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy," the statement said.

The less-than-universal language — "most members" — signals the presence of dissent, as does an acknowledgement that "there were other views and different assessments" and that the G-20 is "not the forum to resolve security issues."

The final product, however, was seen by some as a strong rebuke of a war that has killed thousands, heightened global security tensions and disrupted the world economy.

The public statement used language from a March U.N. resolution that deplored "in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine" and demanded "its complete and unconditional withdrawal" from Ukrainian territory.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the G-20 summit's "surprisingly clear words" on Ukraine "wouldn't have been possible if important countries hadn't helped us to come together this way — that includes India and it also includes, for example, South Africa."

"This is something which shows that there are many in the world who don't think this war is right, who condemn it, even if they abstained in the votes at the United Nations for various reasons," Scholz said. "And I am sure that this is one of the results of this summit: the Russian president stands almost alone in the world with his policy."

John Kirton, director of the G-20 Research Group, called it a "big breakthrough" and an "active shift" by China and India in which they joined the "democratic side of the great immediate geopolitical divide."

Privately, however, some diplomats were wary about declaring that China has shifted its stance on Russia.

Chinese President Xi Jinping may have simply made a decision to not be seen as a spoiler or outlier during face-to-face meetings with other leaders in Bali. The statement also allows China to avoid going all-in with a Russia that is looking more and more isolated as it increases attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

What Beijing hasn't done is change — or even publicly question — its fundamental relations with Russia.

China has closely aligned its foreign policy with Russia in recent years, as pipeline projects and natural gas sales have brought them closer economically.

It has refused to publicly criticize Russia's aggression or even refer to it as an invasion, while criticizing sanctions and accusing the United States and NATO of provoking Putin, although it has warned against allowing the conflict to go nuclear.

Just weeks before Moscow's invasion, the Russian and Chinese leaders met in Beijing, where they signed a joint statement affirming that their bilateral relationship had "no" limits.

It was unclear whether China pushed for the softening language in the G-20 statement acknowledging “other views and different assessments” and that the G-20 is “not the forum to resolve security issues,” but Shi Yinhong, professor of international relations at Beijing’s Renmin University, said it has pushed for such phrases on other occasions.

For India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also avoided criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Modi, however, indicated for the first time in public India’s discomfort with the attack when he met Putin in September.

“I know that today’s era is not of war,” Modi told Putin.

That message “resonated very deeply across all the delegations and helped to bridge the gap across different parties and contributed to the successful outcome of the document” in Bali, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra told reporters.

Navdeep Suri, a retired Indian diplomat, said he sees a subtle shift in India’s position in dealing with Russia.

China, however, may be “in a far more awkward position than India because China is the one that promised unlimited support to Russia a few days before the invasion,” Suri said. “China has (now) gone along with such tough language, including the unconditional and complete withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine.”

Dilip Sinha, another retired Indian diplomat, noted that India continues to buy oil, to trade with Russia and to abstain from U.N. resolutions critical of Russia.

“There is a feeling of bravado in India that it has its way. I don’t see any change at all in India’s policy on Russia on the war in Ukraine,” Sinha said.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Iran commando killed amid protests
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/iran-tehran-protests-commando-killed-war-1760355
GIST	<p>A colonel in Iran's special forces has reportedly been killed as the unrest that has gripped the country for the past two months continues with widespread protests.</p> <p>State news agency Tasnim said the commander of the special unit of Isfahan province, Ismail Chiraghi, was "martyred" after being hit by a bullet in the Khaneh neighborhood of Isfahan. Six people were killed in the Isfahan area, Al Jazeera reported, while reports of further deaths in Kurdistan increased Wednesday's death toll to 15.</p> <p>In the deadliest incident, at least seven people were killed in the city of Izeh, in the southwestern province of Khuzestan. Iranian authorities said two "terrorists" on a motorcycle opened fire on a crowd using an assault rifle. Two boys, aged 9 and 13, were among the victims.</p> <p>Protesters said members of the Basij militia, which operates under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, were responsible, <i>The Guardian</i> reported.</p> <p>Parham Ghobadi, a reporter with BBC Persian, tweeted that Iranian security forces shot Sepehr Maghsoodi, 14, in the head with a live round in Izeh. Ghobadi cited a source close to the family.</p> <p>Nazenin Ansari, the editor of publications for the global Iranian community Kayhan London and KayhanLife.com, said that the demonstrations are more of a threat to the regime than the 2019 protests were. "There is more engagement than three years ago, and they have really evolved from slogans to statements through to being participants in the process," she told <i>Newsweek</i>.</p>

She said that groups that are protesting "all agree on basic human rights, on individual self-determination, on freedom of expression and the release of all political prisoners."

In addition, they want a "secular democratic Iran, not a theocracy," Ansari said.

Following the deaths, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Ami-Abdollahian said that Israel and Western intelligence services had "made plans for a civil war and the destruction and disintegration of Iran," satellite news channel Al Mayadeen, which is based in Beirut, reported.

An Al Mayadeen correspondent [tweeted](#) that Iranian security sources said the protesters were aiming to cause an "internal armed war in Iran."

In their reports, Iranian news agencies have followed the government line that anti-government forces or members of the Islamic State militant group ([ISIS](#)) are responsible for the unrest. But witnesses have said that unarmed civilians were shot.

On Wednesday, chaotic scenes were reported in dozens of cities during the protests and strikes, which coincided [with the third anniversary of a crackdown](#) against demonstrations in which hundreds were killed.

Online videos on Tuesday and Wednesday showed protests and strikes in such cities as Gorgan, Tabriz, Arak, Sanandaj, Mashhad, Kerman, Shiraz and Bandar Abbas.

The protests began after the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, [Mahsa Amini](#), on September 16 after her arrest by the country's morality police three days earlier. She had been accused of improperly wearing her hijab, or headscarf.

Initially, the demonstrations focused on the treatment of women but have turned into a wider protest against the regime. French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) has described the unrest as a "revolution."

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HEADLINE	11/18 China's new daily Covid cases spike
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-new-daily-covid-cases-jump-above-24-000-11668762243?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—China's central government has laid out preparations to deal with surging Covid-19 infections, while warning local authorities against "irresponsible loosening" of pandemic-control measures.</p> <p>China would continue to "rectify the practice of excessive measures such as lockdowns, while also opposing irresponsible attitudes and prevent a loosening up," said Mi Feng, spokesman for China's National Health Commission during a briefing on Thursday.</p> <p>China reported more than 24,000 new locally transmitted Covid-19 cases, according to data from the National Health Commission on Friday, edging closer to the high point seen during Shanghai's monthslong lockdown earlier this year. Infections were recorded all over the country, with numbers rising in two-thirds of the provincial-level regions.</p> <p>Beijing reported more than 450 new cases, close to Monday's record and bringing total cases in the country's capital to almost 2,500 since the government unveiled a raft of measures aimed at easing the impact from stringent pandemic controls. Zhengzhou—where Apple Inc. supplier Foxconn Technology Group has faced an outbreak at the world's biggest iPhone assembly plant—found more than 1,600 new infections, with almost 4,700 new cases detected in China's southwestern metropolis of Chongqing.</p>

Guangzhou, the provincial capital of China's manufacturing powerhouse Guangdong, had the highest tally, with more than 9,000 new cases among its 19 million residents.

China's leadership [issued a notice](#) last Friday that instructed local governments to ease Covid controls, cut the length of quarantines and [reduce unnecessary mass testing](#).

But recent editorials in The People's Daily—the Chinese Communist Party's flagship publication—continued to call on China's population to stick with its approach of staying vigilant and nipping outbreaks in the bud.

The mixed messaging has left local governments trying to figure out [how to handle Covid cases](#) without resorting to the most stringent measures of China's zero-tolerance approach to the virus.

At Thursday's briefing, Beijing also unveiled plans for the hospital system to deal with a surge of new infections by building more facilities for treating severe Covid cases, and to ensure that intensive-care units account for 10% of all hospital beds to tend to the most vulnerable patients.

China has relaxed the categories of people that need to be isolated in response to last Friday's loosening instructions, but it still requires every single infection and their close contacts to enter enforced quarantine.

On Thursday, Guangzhou announced plans to add beds for nearly a quarter of a million people to handle surging infections, including 132,015 in hospital isolation wards and 114,392 for people who are infected but have no symptoms.

Sudden and sometimes [prolonged closures of workplaces](#), schools and neighborhoods have been [fueling frustration and protests](#) across China this year.

On Thursday, public anger welled up again over a child's death that was blamed on excessive pandemic measures. A 4-month-old girl died after suffering vomiting and diarrhea while in quarantine at a hotel in Zhengzhou, according to local news reports.

Emergency services had balked at treating her on Monday because the father had tested positive with the virus, the reports said, citing an account of the incident posted on social media by her father. The girl was sent to a hospital 11 hours after he first called, but died despite efforts to revive her, the reports said.

The Zhengzhou health commission said it was investigating the incident, according to the reports.

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HEADLINE	11/17 State Dept. vows to tackle visa delays
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-vows-to-tackle-visa-delays-as-frustrations-mount-11668718834?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—A top State Department official pledged Thursday that wait times for tourist, student and work visas would shorten significantly in the next year as the department ramps up processing to meet crushing demand for entry to the U.S.</p> <p>The State Department has been struggling to keep up with visas since 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic forced the closing of U.S. consulates around the world, bringing the application process for entry into the country temporarily to a halt. Two and a half years later, some consulates are still offering only emergency appointments.</p> <p>Though visa issuance has mostly rebounded to prepandemic levels, demand for visas is so high that appointments for anyone looking to apply are often booked months or even years out, and the Biden administration has faced mounting anger from business groups, Silicon Valley companies, universities, hospitals and the travel industry over the delays.</p>

The wait times are worse than anything the State Department has seen before, said Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie Stuftt, who briefed reporters Thursday.

“Visas are central for people to see their families, study in the United States and work legally here,” Ms. Stuftt said.

She said the State Department is making a concerted effort to hire more consular staff and expects to fill all open posts by next fall, the end of the government’s fiscal year, to open up more appointments for visas and speed up processing.

The backlog is estimated to have slowed entry to the U.S. for hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

The lack of available appointments has affected companies’ ability to hire new employees, transfer existing employees from abroad and host meetings with international attendees. In some cases, employees have been able to move to the U.S., but visas remain unavailable for their spouses and children. In other cases, employees in the U.S. have been forced to forgo weddings or funerals at home for fear that they wouldn’t be able to find appointments to have their visas stamped to re-enter the country.

“It’s been really painful for us,” said Karan Bhatia, vice president of public affairs at Google. “In a nutshell, when you have employees or partners that are unable to travel to the United States in a timely way, it just becomes really hard to operate a competitive global business.”

Christopher Wendt, legal counsel handling immigration issues at the Mayo Clinic, said visa issues have prevented the Rochester, Minn.-based hospital network from hiring several coveted doctors and sending their staff to international scientific conferences. And for foreign doctors who have been working at the Mayo Clinic since the start of the pandemic, visa delays are taking a personal toll.

“A lot of our staff who have been working heroically for the last couple of years and staying put are naturally now wanting to travel home and see their families,” he said.

The average wait time for a tourist visa appointment—the most commonly sought—is about seven weeks. But demand varies greatly by location, with some of the longest wait times in countries such as India, Mexico and Brazil where demand is highest, according to data compiled by Todd Moss, a former State Department official who is now a fellow at the Institute for Progress and founder of Visa Limbo, a website that tracks the longest wait times.

Wait times in Indian cities including Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata all exceed two years, according to Mr. Moss.

The situation in India in particular has grown so bad that, in the past year, third-party sellers have created bots to snatch up appointments as soon as they become available and resell them at a premium.

Mr. Moss said the issue of wait times is especially problematic compared with European nations and China, which are all processing visas at a faster clip.

“If people have to wait months to get a visa to visit for business, tourism, or to see their families, we are not serious,” he said. “The U.S. cannot possibly compete with China or the Europeans if we cannot issue visas efficiently.”

There isn’t one reason why visa processing has been slow to rebound. The State Department lost a large proportion of its consular staff during the Trump administration and particularly during the pandemic, outside experts say.

While more State Department hires could help with backlogs, newer consular officers have less expertise and make more errors, according to immigration lawyers.

	<p>Immigration lawyers and advocates have also accused the State Department of being slow to adopt technical innovations to speed up visa processing. Unlike with interviews for refugees and citizenship, where the government has started experimenting with virtual interview formats, all visa interviews must be conducted in person.</p> <p>Ms. Stufft said the State Department has found in-person interviews are more efficient, since applicants must come to a consulate anyway to provide fingerprints, and said the department has instead been relying more on interview waivers for some low-risk applicants, such as students or tourists looking to renew their visas. She said nearly half of temporary visas were issued without an interview this year.</p> <p>The State Department is also looking to restart a process, ended in 2004, to renew visas for existing visa holders in the U.S., so they aren't required to travel abroad each time a visa expires. Ms. Stufft declined to provide a timeline for when such a process would become available.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Climate talks 'breakdown' over finance
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/11/17/climate-change-cop27-egypt/
GIST	<p>SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt — With time running out for countries to agree on a road map for tackling climate change, the fate of U.N. climate talks in Egypt appeared in jeopardy Thursday as rich and poor nations continued to disagree on an array of issues, including compensation for harms caused by a warming world.</p> <p>The divide between these two factions at the U.N. Climate Change Conference, also known as COP27, could be seen in an inconclusive 20-page document released early Thursday morning by the Egyptian COP27 presidency. The document showed no consensus around the key issue of finance, particularly funding for irreversible loss and damage caused by rising temperatures.</p> <p>Though negotiators by now had hoped to see a draft of the COP27 cover decision — setting clear goals for the meeting and resolving its thorniest debates — the document was more of a grab bag, listing almost every proposal countries have offered in recent days. The word “placeholder” appears in it 14 times.</p> <p>The vague outline underscored the ironic nature of this year's negotiations: The escalating damage from climate change has deepened divisions between wealthier and developing nations rather than galvanizing more aggressive action. Egypt, the host country, has also struggled to corral the various delegations.</p> <p>“There hasn't been a real effort to bring this to a consensus,” said a European negotiator who spoke on the condition of anonymity because she wasn't authorized to speak publicly.</p> <p>COP27 President Sameh Shoukry acknowledged as much when delegates convened Thursday evening to assess their progress. “We are not where we need to be in order to close this conference with tangible and robust outcomes,” he said. “I know it is late, and we have a long night ahead of us.”</p> <p>In an effort to break the logjam, the European Union offered a proposal to address developing nations' concerns over loss and damage linked to climate change. Its lead negotiator, Frans Timmermans, said the plan would establish a fund designed to address the needs of the most vulnerable countries and would work quickly next year to identify the existing financial gaps and ways to address climate impacts beyond immediate weather disasters.</p> <p>In a more promising move on Thursday, Chinese special climate envoy Xie Zhenhua joined a U.S. event on cutting emissions of methane — a sign of thawing relations after President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at the Group of 20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, this week. Though Beijing stopped short of agreeing to formally join a global pledge to reduce the potent greenhouse gas, it was the first time Xie and U.S. special climate envoy John F. Kerry have appeared together since climate talks between the world's two biggest emitters broke down earlier this year.</p>

The substance of Xie's announcement wasn't new, said Li Shuo, senior global policy adviser for Greenpeace East Asia. But the symbolism of the two diplomats cooperating was crucial for climate talks.

"It's not like when John Kerry and Xie sit together, magic will happen," he said. "But if the political conditions are so poor they cannot talk to each other, then we have even less reason to believe that the global community can actually tackle the climate challenge effectively."

Li suggested Egypt might have been slow-walking negotiations in hopes that the United States and China would make a major announcement, as they did last year in Glasgow, Scotland, that would help galvanize the talks.

On Thursday night, Kerry could be seen walking into the China delegation's offices, where he and Xie spoke one-on-one for at least an hour.

But with just a day to go before the meeting in Egypt is slated to end, it's not clear whether talks between the United States and China can defuse the tensions that have defined this climate conference.

The draft published Thursday reiterates language from last year's Glasgow Pact and the communique released Wednesday by leaders of the world's 20 largest economies. It highlights the need for urgent action to stop the world from heating beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels — which scientists say is necessary to avert the worst effects of climate change.

But it does not include new language proposed by India and generally backed by island nations, the United States and the European Union that would call for a phase-down of all fossil fuels — not just coal but also oil and gas. Nor does it mention an idea floated by the United States that global emissions should peak by 2025, a proposal that would challenge developing countries still trying to secure basic access to heat and electricity for their citizens.

The bullet points on financing loss and damage as well as reforms to help hard-hit countries manage crippling debt — the most contentious issues of the Egypt negotiations — are completely open-ended. The placeholder language offers no clues as to what might emerge from ongoing negotiations.

Yet the document also contains surprising new language that hadn't previously been raised during negotiations. The most noteworthy was a call for developed countries to reach net negative greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 — something wealthy nations are certain to oppose.

In the case of China, the world's most populous nation extracted a record amount of coal in the first eight months of 2022. To avoid power shortages and ensure energy security, the government plans to continue expanding coal mine output through 2025, one reason it has balked at joining the methane pledge and other pledges.

"Because the bulk of China's methane comes from coal mines, which is very hard to reduce in the near term, meeting the terms of the global pledge would be too difficult," said Dimitri de Boer, head of Asia programs for ClientEarth, an environmental charity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's leading scientific body on climate, has said that annual emissions must fall by about 45 percent by the end of the decade to keep the 1.5 degree warming target within reach. Most industrialized regions, including the United States and the E.U., have pledged to curb their emissions by slightly over half in that time frame.

"There's still too many different competing visions," Tom Evans, a policy adviser for the energy think tank E3G, said of the draft text. He feared the lack of consensus on key issues would lead to a long list of ideas being "whittled down" to a few insubstantial topics on which nations can easily agree.

Last year's COP president, Alok Sharma, along with ministers from the E.U. and Canada, met with Shoukry, the COP27 president, on Thursday to highlight their worry about the number of major questions still remaining on the conference agenda.

Sharma urged Shoukry to consider the G-20 communique from leaders in Bali as "a floor, rather than a ceiling," according to a spokesperson for the U.K., which hosted last year's summit in Scotland, and told his Egyptian counterpart that "the last thing anyone wants is for this COP to end without consensus."

The Sharm el-Sheikh meeting has been billed as "the implementation COP" — a conference that would hammer out the details needed to ensure the world follows through on past pledges. Most of the main sticking points come down to accountability and money: How will nations be required to show progress, and who will pay for the society-wide transformation that must occur.

But negotiations over the past two weeks have been sluggish, even by the typically slow pace of global climate talks. Decisions on multiple technical issues, including rules for a new carbon market operated by the United Nations, have already been pushed off until next year.

"We are participating, but clearly implementation in this COP remains elusive, remains a mirage," said Zimbabwe's Fortune Charumbira, president of the Pan-African Parliament.

Many in Egypt believe that finding a compromise on loss and damage is the key to achieving a substantive outcome at these negotiations. Developing countries, led by flood-battered Pakistan, have said they want the world to establish a new fund under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that disaster-struck nations can draw from in an emergency. But wealthy countries, especially the United States, are reluctant to agree to a new fund without knowing exactly how it will operate and where the money will come from.

Diplomats from Britain and New Zealand have been working with representatives of small island states to find a compromise, one that would buy more time to flesh out the details of a potential funding mechanism while still reassuring vulnerable countries that their needs will be met.

While negotiations sputtered on Thursday, diplomats from developing nations issued an emotional plea for more action as climate change exacts a growing toll on their people.

"We need to move from a purely expressive political commitment to a decision to establish a loss and damage fund," said Molwyn Joseph, the lead negotiator from the Caribbean country of Antigua and Barbuda. "Anything less ... is a betrayal."

Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's climate change minister, acknowledged the political obstacles facing the leaders being asked to pay for climate harms. Many wealthy nations are facing a cost-of-living crisis and an energy crunch amid the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Officials from the United States and other countries have also warned that agreeing to a loss and damage fund might lead to legal liability for trillions of dollars in climate harms.

But Rehman said nations must find a way to work around those issues — otherwise humanity will never be able to collectively achieve its climate goals.

"We have to go forward with at the very least a political announcement of intent," she said. "If this continues to be kicked down the road, we will see this as a justice-denied issue."

While diplomats haggled behind closed doors, a coalition of civil society groups took over one of the conference's main meeting halls Thursday for a "People's Plenary." It was one of the most raucous acts of protest yet at COP27, which has been heavily criticized for limiting people's ability to demonstrate outside of the United Nations-controlled venue.

	<p>Activists from Indigenous communities, youth groups and vulnerable nations blasted negotiators for failing to agree on funding loss and damage and a fossil fuel phase-down, and emphasized the need for even stronger commitments to prevent warming beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius.</p> <p>As they streamed out of the plenary hall, activists hoisted a giant, silver, inflatable pipeline emblazoned with the words “PHASE OUT FOSSIL FUELS.”</p> <p>They filled a grassy area of the conference venue, punching their fists in the air and shouting, “The people! United! Will never be defeated!”</p> <p>But the divisions among negotiators have probably doomed the talks to stretch into overtime. Even if they work round-the-clock, many don’t expect the conference to end until late Saturday.</p> <p>As nations wrangled over issues of payment and process, U.N. Secretary General António Guterres on Thursday evening offered nations a stern reminder of the stakes.</p> <p>“There has been clearly, as in past times, a breakdown in trust between North and South, and between developed and emerging economies,” he said. “This is no time for finger-pointing. The blame game is a recipe for mutually assured destruction. I am here to appeal to all parties to rise to this moment and to the greatest challenge that humanity is facing.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 More adults carry loaded handguns daily
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221117-more-u-s-adults-carrying-loaded-handguns-daily-study
GIST	<p>The number of U.S. adult handgun owners carrying a loaded handgun on their person doubled from 2015 to 2019, according to new research led by the University of Washington.</p> <p>Data come from the 2019 National Firearms Survey (NFS), an online survey of U.S. adults living in households with firearms, including nearly 2,400 handgun owners. Compared to estimates from prior UW-led research, the new study suggests that in 2019 approximately 16 million adult handgun owners had carried a loaded handgun on their person in the past month (up from 9 million in 2015) and 6 million carried every day (twice as many as carried daily in 2015).</p> <p>Published Nov. 16 in the <i>American Journal of Public Health</i>, the study also found that a larger proportion of handgun owners carried handguns in states with less restrictive carrying regulations: In these states, approximately one-third of handgun owners reported carrying in the past month, whereas in states with more restrictive regulations, only about one-fifth did.</p> <p>“Between increases in the number of people who own handguns and the number of people who carry every day, there has been a striking increase in handgun carrying in the U.S.,” said lead author Dr. Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, a professor of epidemiology and Bartley Dobb Professor for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the UW.</p> <p>Among the other findings reported in the new study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · About 7 in 10 handgun owners said they carried a loaded handgun as protection against another person, dwarfing the number who said they carried as protection against an animal, for example, or for work · 4 in 5 handgun owners who reported carrying were male, 3 in 4 were white, and a majority were between the ages of 18 and 44 <p>Researchers pointed to some limitations of the study: Respondents were asked if they carried, and how often, but not where. It is possible that a person residing in a state with one type of permitting restrictions (or none) could have carried their handgun in another state with different laws. The study also did not ask whether the respondent carried a handgun openly or concealed.</p>

	<p>While the data are from 2019, researchers say the findings are timely, following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June that struck down a New York state handgun-carrying law. States, in general, have become less restrictive over the years regarding handgun carrying — more than 20 do not require permits to carry today, compared to only one such state in 1990. The differences highlighted in this study suggest that this behavior may be responsive to the types of laws governing carrying that pertain in a state.</p> <p>“The Supreme Court ruling has already resulted in some states’ loosening of laws related to handgun carrying,” Rowhani-Rahbar said. “In light of that ruling, our study reinforces the importance of studying the implications of handgun carrying for public health and public safety.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 UN maintains Somalia arms embargo
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/un-maintains-somali-arms-embargo-over-government-objections/2022/11/17/66d756ec-66fb-11ed-b08c-3ce222607059_story.html
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations Security Council voted Thursday to maintain an arms embargo on Somalia over strong objections from its government, saying the al-Shabab “terrorist group” still seriously threatens peace and stability in the region and sanctions are needed to degrade its activities.</p> <p>The resolution, which also expresses concern at the continued presence of affiliates of the Islamic State extremist group in the Horn of African nation, was approved by a vote of 11-0 with Russia, China, Gabon and Ghana abstaining in support of the call by the Somali government, backed by the African Union, to lift the arms embargo.</p> <p>The British-drafted resolution does modify the arms embargo to reflect the government’s progress in improving its management of weapons and ammunition.</p> <p>This includes allowing Somalia to import portable surface-to-air missiles, higher-caliber mortars, anti-tank guided weapons, combat drones, some aircraft and vessels designed or modified for military use, and combat drones for use by its security forces and police — unless the Security Council committee monitoring sanctions objects within five working days of receiving notification from the government.</p> <p>Britain’s deputy U.N. ambassador James Kariuki said the benchmarks identified following a recent technical assessment highlighting Somalia’s progress provide “a clear roadmap ... that will help this council make further changes to weapons and ammunition measures in the future.”</p> <p>“The steps made today will simplify processes for Somalia and its partners, and help speed up the journey,” he said.</p> <p>The resolution keeps in place the codified arms embargo, a ban on the sale or transfer of key components of improvised explosive devices that al-Shabab has used, a ban on the import and export of Somali charcoal that was a key money-earner, and travel bans and asset freezes on individuals threatening peace and associated with al-Shabab, including by financing or facilitating its activities.</p> <p>The Security Council imposed the arms embargo on Somalia in 1992 to cut the flow of weapons to feuding clan-based warlords who toppled dictator Mohamed Siad Barre the previous year, plunging the country into civil war. Somalia established a functioning transitional government in 2012 and has been working to rebuild stability in the face of extremist attacks and one of the worst droughts the country has experienced that has brought thousands to the brink of famine.</p> <p>Somalia’s government under recently elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has been engaged in a new offensive against al-Shabab, including efforts to shut down its financial network.</p> <p>U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood expressed hope that the government will continue to make progress on the benchmarks, allowing for further easing of the arms embargo.</p>

He said the sanctions regime adopted Thursday is tailored to support and enable “robust action” by the government to combat al-Shabab including by depriving the extremist group of its financial resources. And he urged all countries to implement sanctions and deprive al-Shabab of the ability to access funds and weapons.

Somalia’s U.N. Ambassador Abukar Osman expressed “deep dissatisfaction” with the extension of the arms embargo and praised the four countries that abstained for not supporting it.

He warned that the arms embargo, which is the longest U.N. sanctions regime, is hindering efforts to rebuild the country’s security forces to counter al-Shabab.

The army used “a major portion” of its armaments during engagements with al-Shabab in the last four months, Osman said, and as a result of the arms embargo renewal, “our hands are tied in the fight against the ruthless enemy at this most critical time.”

Osman said victims of Somalia’s “terrorist groups” are asking why lifting the arms embargo is a threat to international peace and security while other countries are being armed to defend their territory and people.

“This unjust and unfair double standard is preventing the government of Somalia to legally obtain military lethal equipment to rebuild its national army,” he told the council.

Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya, whose neighboring country has also been targeted by al-Shabab, supported the resolution, saying the Security Council had taken “a strong stand together against terrorism.”

But he also urged an end to the arms embargo.

“There is little doubt that the battlefield conduct and the determination of the Somali forces and government will in short order lead to the dropping of the embargo,” Kimani said. “The partial arms embargo in Somalia cannot exist in perpetuity, as it is counterproductive and adversely affects the capability of the federal government to eradicate the existential threat posed by al-Shabab.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 World Cup spotlight on Qatar foreign policy
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/world-cup-puts-spotlight-qatars-wealth-foreign-policy-2022-11-18/
GIST	<p>DOHA, Nov 18 (Reuters) - World Cup host Qatar, an energy, investment and media powerhouse which also wields influence as a diplomatic power-broker, will come under the spotlight when the competition begins on Sunday.</p> <p>The Gulf Arab state has used a complex web of friendships nurtured by its gas riches to become a go-to mediator in global diplomacy, hosting both the Middle East's biggest U.S. airbase while opening its doors to Islamists and forging ties with Iran.</p> <p>Employing wide-ranging political ties, it has helped to free hostages and secure peace agreements from Sudan to Somalia.</p> <p>Here is a look at the international role and immense wealth of the small desert peninsula country.</p> <p>AFGHANISTAN</p> <p>Few moves appear to have paid quite as large a diplomatic dividend as Qatar's role over Afghanistan, cultivated since it let the Taliban open the group's main international office in 2013. Qatar also provided the venue for peace talks that led to last year's U.S. agreement to withdraw.</p> <p>As temporary home to the evacuated Afghanistan embassies of the United States and several European allies, it has served as a central mediator for Western efforts to engage the Taliban.</p>

Analysts describe the Afghan role played by Qatar -- a small state surrounded by better-armed rivals -- as part of efforts to strengthen Qatari security by becoming indispensable as an international mediator.

HAMAS

Qatar has opened its doors to leaders of Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that rules the Gaza Strip. Doha has also played a role in ceasefire negotiations between Hamas and Israel. Qatar has helped Gaza pay its fuel bills and has provided humanitarian aid.

At the same time, in a sign of Doha's pragmatism, Qatar has authorised direct flights between Tel Aviv and Doha during the World Cup despite having no formal relations with Israel. A Qatari official has said the agreement on flights is part of Qatar's commitment to FIFA's hosting requirements and "should not be politicised".

Between 10,000 and 20,000 Israelis are expected at the month-long matches in the Gulf emirate, an unprecedented influx after years in which it admitted only low-key delegates.

ISLAMISTS

Hamas is one of several anti-Western groups such as the Taliban and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front hosted by Qatar. Doha also provides a haven for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which opposes the absolute rule of the Gulf's hereditary rulers.

Qatar's critics accuse Doha of backing militant Islamists in Libya and elsewhere and helping enrich militant kidnappers by paying ransom for hostages, a charge Qatar denies.

Fellow Gulf states Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, along with Egypt, cut relations with Doha in 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism. Doha denied the allegation.

SYRIA

Qatar infuriated neighbouring states when it backed pro-democracy movements and rebels across the region during the 2011 Arab Spring.

Qatar became a major backer of rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad after war erupted in Syria in 2011, providing weapons and other support.

While Qatar denied backing groups with al Qaeda ties, it had channels to the Nusra Front, a group that was formerly al Qaeda's official affiliate in Syria and is listed as a terrorist group by the United Nations. Qatari mediation helped to secure the release of numerous captives held by the Nusra Front, many of them foreigners.

MEDIA

Qatar has established itself as a major player in news media since the Doha-based Al Jazeera network was set up in 1996.

Reflecting Qatar's perspective on regional and international affairs, Al Jazeera has helped to shape public opinion in many Arab countries, prompting bans in countries such as Egypt.

Qatar also owns beIN, a media conglomerate that is the official broadcaster of the World Cup in most countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and also in France.

INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT

Qatar's wealth is mostly controlled through the Qatar Investment Authority, estimated by wealth fund tracker Global SWF to manage \$445 billion in assets.

QIA owns a wide array of business interests, including huge real estate and hospitality holdings in Britain.

	<p>It also owns a 19% stake in Russian state-backed oil giant Rosneft.</p> <p>QIA is also one of the largest shareholders in troubled Swiss lender Credit Suisse.</p> <p>GAS WEALTH</p> <p>Qatar is the world's largest holder of proven gas reserves after Russia and Iran. Its North Field is part of the world's biggest gas field that Qatar shares with Iran, which calls its share South Pars. Qatar is currently expanding its gas production capabilities and expects a more than 60% increase in output by 2027.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 US vet killed fighting in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/nov/17/us-veteran-killed-while-fighting-ukraine/
GIST	<p>A U.S. Army veteran from Kansas who volunteered to defend Ukraine following Russia's invasion was killed last week near Kherson in his first mission as a member of the International Legion of the Ukrainian armed forces.</p> <p>Trent Davis, 21, was killed on Nov. 8. He is believed to have been at least the 10th American to die while fighting for Ukraine since Feb. 24 when Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion.</p> <p>The International Legion was created at the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to encourage outside supporters with military experience to fight for his country. Family members of Mr. Davis told the Military Times publication that he joined out of a sense of duty to help Ukraine repel the Russian invasion.</p> <p>"He wanted to do his part to bring kids into a safer world, even if it could cause him to sacrifice his life," his mother, Janie Broadbent, told Military Times. "He said Russians are pretty much bullies, and he just wanted to help people."</p> <p>Although a U.S. military veteran, Mr. Davis reportedly had no combat experience prior to arriving in Ukraine. The circumstances that resulted in his death in Ukraine were not immediately known.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 FBI concern: China secret police stations
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/18/fbi-director-very-concerned-by-reports-of-secret-chinese-police-stations-in-us
GIST	<p>The United States is deeply concerned about the Chinese government setting up unauthorised "police stations" in US cities to possibly pursue influence operations, FBI director Christopher Wray has said.</p> <p>"I'm very concerned about this. We are aware of the existence of these stations," Wray told a US Senate homeland security and governmental affairs committee hearing, acknowledging the FBI's investigative work on the issue but declining to give details.</p> <p>"But to me, it is outrageous to think that the Chinese police would attempt to set up shop, you know, in New York, let's say, without proper coordination. It violates sovereignty and circumvents standard judicial and law enforcement cooperation processes."</p> <p>Wray, asked by Republican Senator Rick Scott if such stations violated US law, said the FBI was "looking into the legal parameters".</p> <p>Safeguard Defenders, a Europe-based human rights organisation, published a report in September revealing the presence of dozens of Chinese police "service stations" in major cities around the world, including New York.</p>

The report said the stations were an extension of Beijing's efforts to pressure some Chinese nationals or their relatives abroad to return to China to face criminal charges. It also linked them to the activities of China's United Front Work Department, a Communist party body charged with spreading its influence and propaganda overseas.

Republicans in the US House of Representatives, including Greg Murphy and Mike Waltz, sent letters to the Justice Department in October asking if President Joe Biden's administration was investigating such stations and arguing they could be used to intimidate US residents of Chinese origin.

China's embassy in Washington did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Earlier this month, China's foreign ministry denied it had such stations in the Netherlands after an inquiry by Dutch authorities. China said they were offices to help Chinese citizens renew documents.

Wray said the United States had made a number of indictments involving the Chinese government harassing, stalking, surveilling, and blackmailing people in the United States who disagreed with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

"It's a real problem and something that we're talking with our foreign partners about, as well, because we're not the only country where this has occurred," he said.

The United States unsealed criminal charges in October against seven Chinese nationals accused of waging a surveillance and harassment campaign against a US resident and his family in an effort by the Chinese government to repatriate one of them back to China.

It was the latest case by the Justice Department targeting China's effort to track down people overseas who Beijing calls criminal suspects, known as "Operation Fox Hunt".

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HEADLINE	11/18 Day 268 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/18/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-268-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia unleashed another wave of rocket, drone and missile strikes across Ukraine on Thursday morning. The latest strikes mark the sixth mass attack since early October, which Ukrainian authorities say are aimed at destroying the country's energy system.• Winter's first snow fell in Kyiv while authorities said they were working to restore power nationwide after Russia earlier this week unleashed what Ukraine said was the heaviest bombardment of civilian infrastructure of the war.• The Donetsk region experienced the heaviest fighting of the war so far. Russian forces were reinforced by troops pulled from Kherson city in the south which Ukraine recaptured last week. Russian forces fired artillery on the towns of Bakhmut and nearby Soledar, among others, the Ukrainian military said.• About 10 million people were without power, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in a Thursday evening video address. Authorities in some places had ordered forced emergency blackouts, he said.• A deal brokered by the UN and Turkey in July aimed at easing global food shortages was extended for four months on Thursday, though Russia said its own demands were yet to be fully addressed.• Strikes on critical infrastructure in Odesa and Dnipro were confirmed by the presidential administration and the regional heads. Three people were reportedly injured in Odesa region, while another 14 people were injured in the strike on Dnipro city, according to its mayor, Borys Filatov.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two people were killed in a missile attack overnight on the south-eastern region of Zaporizhzhia, according to local officials. Three were wounded in an attack on the north-eastern city of Kharkiv, they added. • Investigators in recaptured territory in the area uncovered 63 bodies bearing signs of torture after Russian forces left, Ukraine's interior minister was quoted as saying. Russia denies its troops target civilians or have committed atrocities. Mass burial sites have been found in other parts previously occupied by Russian troops, including some with civilian bodies showing signs of torture. • The UK's Ministry of Defence said the barrage of missiles that struck Ukraine on Tuesday was probably the largest number of strikes that Russia had conducted in a day since the first week of its invasion. • The US secretary of state Antony Blinken said the US had “seen nothing so far that contradicts” Poland's preliminary assessment that Ukrainian air defences were to blame for Tuesday's missile incident. US president Joe Biden disputed Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy's comment that the missiles that landed in Poland on Tuesday were not of Ukrainian origin, saying this is not what evidence suggested. • The Kremlin said it could not imagine engaging in “public” negotiations with Ukraine. In a call with reporters, spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused Kyiv of changing its position regarding possible Russia-Ukraine peace talks, adding that the war would continue regardless of dropping temperatures. • Ukrainian forces control about 1% of territory in the eastern region of Luhansk, according to the Russian-installed head of the area. The Moscow-backed administrator, Leonid Pasechnik, was cited as saying that Ukraine controlled the village of Belogorovka and two other settlements in the region. • A member of Russia's armed forces who took part in the invasion of Ukraine has requested political asylum after landing in Madrid, the Guardian learned. • The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said he believed neither Russia nor the US planned to use nuclear weapons. Erdoğan's comments came after US central intelligence agency (CIA) director William Burns and Sergei Naryshkin, head of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service, met this week in Ankara in what was the first known high-level, face-to-face US-Russian contact since the war began in February. • A Dutch court has found three men guilty of the murder of 298 people on board flight MH17, which was shot down by a Russian surface-to-air missile when it was flying over eastern Ukraine in 2014.
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HEADLINE	11/18 Fire in Gaza refugee camp kills 21
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fire-in-gaza-refugee-camp-kills-21-11668758866?mod=hp_featst_pos3
GIST	<p>A fire in a residential building in the Gaza Strip killed 21 people, the Palestinian enclave's Interior Ministry said, in one of the deadliest incidents in the territory in recent years outside of its conflict with Israel.</p> <p>The blaze erupted in a multistory building Thursday night in the crowded Jabalia refugee camp and spread fast due to a large amount of gasoline being stored there, said the ministry, which didn't clarify how the fire started.</p> <p>Videos published by local media organizations showed flames engulfing the top floor of the building and spewing from its windows as firefighters worked to prevent the blaze from spreading to nearby homes.</p> <p>“Preliminary investigations showed that the storing of a large amount of benzene inside the burning house contributed to the massive escalation of the fire and the occurrence of this number of deaths,” said Iyad al-Bazim, Gaza's Interior Ministry spokesman.</p>

	<p>Due to a persistent energy crisis in Gaza, many people store gasoline and cooking gas in their homes. The enclave has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since being taken over by Islamist militant group Hamas in 2007.</p> <p>Hamas's leader, Ismail Haniyeh, blamed the fire on the blockade, saying Israel bans rescue teams in Gaza from having the advanced equipment needed to deal with such a big fire.</p> <p>"We call on the free world to raise its voice loudly and do what is necessary to face up to the criminal occupier that besieges Gaza," Mr. Haniyeh said in a statement.</p> <p>Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said in a tweet late Thursday that Israel had offered to assist by evacuating injured Gazans to hospitals in Israel.</p> <p>"The state of Israel and defense establishment send our condolences following the tragic incident in Gaza," Mr. Gantz wrote.</p> <p>Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas declared Friday a day of mourning.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Officials urge holiday gatherings caution
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-seattle-childrens-hospital-washington-state-wsha-over-capacity-overwhelmed-children-holiday-gatherings#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Families are bracing for the potential of respiratory illnesses ahead of the holiday season where many families will be gathering together.</p> <p>Hospitals across Washington state are seeing the effects of respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, with emergency departments exceeding 100% capacity in many hospitals.</p> <p>For most healthy people, RSV is a cold-like nuisance. But for the very young, the elderly, and people with certain health problems, it can be serious and even life-threatening. The virus can infect deep in the lungs, causing pneumonia, and in babies it can impede breathing by inflaming their tiny airways.</p> <p>Mother Alisa Peterson said she got a first hand look at the effects RSV has on kids after her nephew was diagnosed with RSV. Peterson said her nephew was sick for a few months, but with no specific treatment for RSV infections, she said they just hoped for the best.</p> <p>"There wasn't a lot to do, so I know they did some kind of steroid for him to help his lungs a bit but there wasn't much to do other than hope he doesn't get worse," said Peterson.</p> <p>Health officials with Mary Bridge Children's Hospital said that patients are still waiting hours to get seen with one of the longest wait times earlier this week hitting 12 hours and on Wednesday they said they saw over 220 patients.</p> <p>"We're making sure that we have capacity to treat those that come see us and make sure that we prioritize the sickest and the youngest," said Ben Whitworth, Chief Operating Officer with Mary Bridge Children's Hospital.</p> <p>In an update Monday, the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) said the increase in RSV cases comes at a time when hospital capacity across the state remains limited.</p> <p>WSHA Executive Vice President Taya Briley said RSV is impacting kids earlier in the season and emergency departments (ED) are exceeding 100% capacity in many hospitals. She said beds are filling due to seasonal illnesses, the flu, COVID-19 spreading, and patients in need of care.</p>

Officials at Seattle Children's hospital said they continue to see long wait times with some patients being seen outside the hallways of the emergency department. A tent was set up outside the hospital's emergency department to help handle the influx of cases.

The tent is one of many ways the hospital's emergency department is staying prepared during the unprecedented volume of patients, according to a statement from Seattle Children's hospital officials.

"When volumes rise in the ED [Emergency Department], we use a number of strategies to optimize ancillary care space, including doubling up rooms in inpatient floors, converted storage rooms, and if necessary, the tent. The tent has been available as an ancillary care space for the past few years," officials said in a statement.

Hospitals expect to see increases in RSV in the coming months. Hospital officials ask that the community take precautions when they gather this holiday season to prevent the spread of RSV, as well as the flu and COVID-19.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Spokane I-90 homeless camp faces winter
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/homeless/homeless-encampment-i-90-spokane-wsdot-jewels-helping-hands/293-45846632-ad39-43dd-97b8-e1ffae543226
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — As the frigid weather settles in over the region, organizers of the I-90 homeless encampment are providing more necessities for its campers.</p> <p>Some of the newest updates at the homeless encampment by I-90 and Freya is gravel that has been laid down to prevent muddy surfaces and 800 gallons of water that the state is providing once a week.</p> <p>The camp is also providing State ID and housing services, EBT cards for food assistance, and transportation to shelters.</p> <p>Chris Senn has lived at the camp for over 8 months.</p> <p>"The benefit is everything is right here. Without this, I probably would have been lost. I wouldn't know where to go to start the process of getting my life back in order. I would have never known that housing was an option for low-income and all that," said Senn.</p> <p>Jewels Helping Hands says they are no longer accepting more residents.</p> <p>This decision was made because Jewels Helping Hands' is focused on finding housing for all its residents.</p> <p>"We're still focused on getting people housing ready. And trying to maintain some kind of safety throughout the winter. But definitely our goal is to remove everyone from the property. You will not see an increase in those numbers because we stopped badging," said Julie Garcia, the founder of Jewels Helping Hands.</p> <p>With the start of winter weather, Garcia says that they now have heating tents spread throughout the camp that are monitored 24-7.</p> <p>There is a point-person that walks around the camp looking out for fire dangers every hour.</p> <p>Chris says that he's got his own heater and is comfortable, but is ready to leave.</p> <p>"I've got a heater, I've got several blankets and good sleeping bags," said Senn. "It's just like camping so to speak. I'm ready to get out, get a house."</p>

	<p>Even though Jewels Helping Hands is following WSDOT's plan to clear the camp, they still don't have a set timeline for when that will happen.</p> <p>Garcia says that there are 445 people with ID badges that live at the camp and that's down from over 600 from when they first started the ID process.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 RSV cases steadily rising in Spokane
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/rsv-cases-on-rise-spokane/293-4f948693-6823-423d-b092-51359cea9931
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — A surge in RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) cases is placing a major strain on our nation's hospitals right now.</p> <p>Pediatric hospitals across Washington state are swamped with children infected by RSV. Many are operating at 100 % capacity almost 24 hours a day.</p> <p>Here in Spokane, Sacred Heart Children's Hospital has seen a significant increase in young children with the virus. A spokesperson from Sacred Heart Children's Hospital says that the hospital says half of all their hospital admissions are mostly from RSV.</p> <p>They say that they're seeing the RSV surge earlier in the season than usual.</p> <p>RSV is mostly transmitted by touch, so doctors say you don't have to cancel holiday plans but they do urge parents to take steps to reduce risk for little ones at any group gatherings.</p> <p>Some doctors want some parents to consider staying home if your babies have existing medical problems.</p> <p>Doctors say washing hands frequently is one of the best ways to protect yourself against RSV.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Seoul police ignored crowd danger signs?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/17/world/asia/seoul-itaewon-crowd-crush.html
GIST	<p>For years, officials had known that Halloween weekends in Itaewon, a popular nightlife district in Seoul, attracted large crowds, warning internally that people could be “crushed to death.”</p> <p>For days, they had held meetings and filed reports about their expectations for “disorderly” throngs, with one local police chief asking higher-ups to deploy crowd control officers.</p> <p>For hours, they had received desperate calls about partygoers trapped in a narrow alleyway, pleas for the authorities to intervene as people were “falling and hurt” in a “bottleneck.”</p> <p>Each time, the authorities ignored or missed the warnings, crucial chances to prevent a crowd crush in Itaewon on Oct. 29 that would kill 158 people and leave 196 injured. A New York Times analysis, based on witness accounts, investigators’ findings, parliamentary testimony and official documents released to lawmakers, provides troubling new details of the government’s lax approach to safety and the failures in its emergency response.</p> <p>Less than a dozen police officers were in the area until 8 p.m., almost an hour and a half after the first call for help. Emergency dispatchers directed officers to street fights and other lesser incidents, while officials monitoring surveillance cameras didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. Rescue and crisis management efforts were delayed by a lack of coordination and poor coordination, with many supervisors and top officials unaware of the crisis until 11 p.m. or later.</p>

South Korean authorities and lawmakers are now investigating what went wrong, especially how officials missed early signs of trouble and why it took so long to send help.

“It’s a disaster created by administrative incompetence,” said Min Hyungbae, an independent lawmaker who visited the Itaewon alleyways alone on a recent night. “It’s as if our country is going backward.”

The police and fire departments, as well as various agencies involved in the emergency response, including the local ward office, declined to comment beyond previous public statements. The president’s office said it has ordered a thorough investigation and will take further actions based on its results.

Despite its technological, economic and cultural achievements, the country has been plagued by a series of human-caused disasters, including a [department store collapse](#), a [ferry sinking](#) and catastrophic fires.

Until moving into a new official residence, President Yoon Suk Yeol had lived in [an apartment tower](#) built on the site of the department store collapse. On the eighth anniversary of the ferry disaster in April, he said “the sincerest way of commemorating the victims was to make South Korea safe.”

When thousands rallied this month to mourn the Itaewon tragedy, they denounced him for failing to fulfill his promise.

“The way to commemorate the victims is for you to resign!” they chanted.

Ignoring Early Signs

This year’s Halloween gathering, the first since pandemic-related restrictions ended, promised to be big.

Days before, officials discussed ways to make the night safe and manage disorderly crowds, largely sharing concerns of people spilling into car lanes and men wielding “fake weapons” and “bikini girls” who might expose “too much,” according to official documents from the police, the fire department and the Yongsan ward office, which oversees Itaewon. The police, in a news release, [reported a spike](#) in the number of people searching “Halloween” and “Itaewon” on the internet.

The growing popularity of the holiday and the potential for “safety accidents” had long worried the authorities. In 2020, when the Halloween crowd was smaller, the police warned in an internal document, obtained by opposition lawmakers, of possible “crush deaths.”

The warrens of bars and restaurants were also made more cramped by unpermitted construction at the Hamilton Hotel like a metal wall, further restricting the lanes around it including the alleyway, where the fatal crowd crush would occur, according to police and Seoul government officials. The local Yongsan authorities imposed fines but did nothing to remove the illegal structures.

The hotel did not comment, citing the pending investigations.

South Korea runs battalions of police officers with specialized training in crowd control. On the day of the tragedy, 4,700 were deployed along the road from downtown Seoul to the president’s office, less than a mile from Itaewon, to monitor tens of thousands of protesters frustrated with his leadership. None were assigned to Itaewon, where an estimated 130,000 people were in attendance that night.

Days before the disaster, the Yongsan police station repeatedly asked the Seoul Metropolitan Police for such officers to be on site for Halloween, the Yongsan police chief, Lee Im-jae, told Parliament.

Mr. Lee said he was told they could not be diverted from the political rallies.

On Oct. 25, the chief of the Itaewon police station, which is smaller and supervised by the Yongsan one, told higher-ups that he “desperately” needed more officers to control Halloween traffic, according to parliamentary testimony by the Seoul police chief and opposition lawmakers.

But when police and city officials met with Itaewon business owners the next day to discuss Halloween, they did not make plans for crowd control, Woo Jong-Soo, chief superintendent general of the National Police Agency, said this month.

On Oct. 29, 137 officers were assigned to Itaewon, and at least 52 were detectives specializing in drug crimes. The police invited journalists to cover their busts, according to South Korean media and the reporters themselves.

When asked whether the government's war on drugs distracted officials from ensuring crowd safety, the Seoul metropolitan police chief, Kim Kwang-ho, told Parliament last week that "we were significantly focused on drugs." But the president's office said the disaster was unrelated to his new antidrug campaign in recent weeks, instead blaming the police and other agencies for failing to anticipate crowd accidents.

Dismissing Desperate Pleas

The police planned to deploy most of the 137 officers after 8 p.m., based on Halloween traffic from previous years. Before 8 p.m., only 11 officers from the Itaewon police station were on duty, according to Lee Hyungseok, an opposition lawmaker who reviewed police records.

The city's new [digital map](#) was in operation to track real-time densities if officials had wanted to monitor the crowds. Separately, the Yongsan ward office, which runs surveillance cameras throughout Itaewon, failed to report anything unusual, Kim Sung-ho, a senior home ministry official, said during a briefing.

[Desperate calls](#) from Itaewon started coming into the 112 emergency hotline at 6:34 p.m. People reported "utter chaos" and a crowd "out of control," according to call logs released to lawmakers.

"It looks like people are going to be squashed to death," said the first caller, describing masses of people pressing from both ends of the alleyway.

Between then and 10:11 p.m., more than 10 calls came in pointing to a crowd surge.

The first call was dismissed as nothing serious, Hwang Chang-son, a senior official from the National Police Agency, told reporters. The dispatchers did not follow up closely on subsequent calls, either.

Higher-ups also failed to detect a crisis developing, including their supervisor, Senior Superintendent Ryu Mi-jin, who was in her own office upstairs.

"All I can say is that I am sorry," Ms. Ryu said during a parliamentary hearing, adding that it was customary for the supervisor to be separate. She said she was not informed of the crisis until 11:39 p.m., nearly an hour after rescuers were already on the scene.

Dispatchers at the hotline passed the details on two calls — at 8:37 p.m. and again at 9:01 p.m. — to their counterparts at a separate 119 disaster-response center, asking them to look into reports of a possible crowd crush. But the cases were closed after those dispatchers spoke to the callers, according to the fire department's answers to lawmakers.

"We regret that those on duty did not pay enough attention," Nam Hwa-young, acting chief of the National Fire Agency, which manages the 119 hotline, told Parliament.

Throughout the evening, [Kim Baek-gyeom](#), a sergeant in the Itaewon police station, said he and his colleagues were busy with routine assignments. Around 10 p.m., he said he and two colleagues were sent to check on a possible street fight near the alleyway. When they got there, they saw the crowd crush.

"We heard screams and commotion, and when we pushed our way through, we saw people crushed under a wave of human bodies and holding out their hands asking for help," Mr. Kim said in [a radio interview](#). "Until then, we had no idea what was happening."

Triggering Alarms Too Late

A call to the 119 hotline at 10:15 p.m. finally got the authorities' attention.

"You have to send police, fire engines, whatever you got — people are being squeezed to death," the caller said, according to the logs. "I see injured people sprawled on the street."

Eighty-six more calls came into the hotline over the next several hours. Dispatchers could hear screaming, crying, moaning and shouts of "Please help!" and "Don't push! Don't push!"

At 10:42 p.m., more than four hours after the initial report about the crowd surge, firefighters reported their first official contact with victims, urgently asking for help. "We are performing CPR on 15 people but we don't have enough hands," a firefighter said, according to transcripts of the firefighters' communications.

Choi Seong-beom, head of the Yongsan fire station, repeatedly asked for more rescuers, according to the transcripts. He also pleaded for more police officers to help clear the streets of crowds and cars blocking ambulances and emergency responders.

"There are so many patients who need CPR we can't count them," Mr. Choi said.

It was not until 10:48 p.m. that the narcotics detectives — who did not catch a single drug user that night — were redirected to rescue efforts, according to the police. Crowd control officers were assigned to Itaewon only at 11:40 p.m., three hours after the political rallies ended.

A lack of coordination complicated efforts. A dispatcher from the National Emergency Medical Center complained to counterparts in the fire department and Seoul city that the police were blocking some rescuers from the scene. At one point, the dispatcher threatened to "stop sending our teams out," according to an exchange between the agencies obtained by another lawmaker.

"Stop transporting the dead now," the dispatcher told 119 counterparts. "We first have to move the 40 people who are still alive, including those in critical condition."

The government initially said that there was a limit to what it could do to control spontaneous crowds of partygoers. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo cited a lack of "laws" and "systems." "My office has done all it could," Park Hee-young, chief of the Yongsan office, said on Oct. 31.

As public outrage mounted, the government's tone shifted. "How can you say we could not deal with it because of a lack of system?" the president said last week.

But President Yoon blamed officers in the field. "The 137 officers should have been able to handle it," he said. "Why did they just look and do nothing for four hours? They were there."

A number of mid-ranking police and fire officials have been suspended from their jobs or are under investigation for possible criminal negligence. A police officer under investigation died by suicide last week.

Finding Fault at the Top

South Koreans have expressed gratitude to rescuers. They flooded the website of the Yongsan fire station with thank-you notes and sent fried chicken and tangerines to the Itaewon police station.

Increasingly, they have directed their anger at senior leaders. At a government mourning site near City Hall, a woman who said she lost her son [destroyed](#) a condolence wreath from Mr. Yoon. A citizen hung a [46-foot-long banner](#), demanding the "embarrassing" president resign.

	<p>The absence of senior leaders can prove problematic in the country's hierarchical bureaucracy. "South Korean public servants rarely act unless their bosses tell them what to do," said Yoon Yong-Kyun, a professor of public safety at Semyung University.</p> <p>The president learned about the disaster at 11:01 p.m., and his home minister, who was in charge of all police and firefighters, at 11:20 p.m. It was nearly midnight when Seoul issued mobile phone alerts asking citizens to avoid Itaewon.</p> <p>Mr. Kim, the Seoul police chief, did not learn of what happened until Mr. Lee, the Yongsan police chief, called him at 11:36 p.m.</p> <p>After dealing with the political protests until the early evening, Mr. Lee had planned to check on the Halloween festivities that night. He finished dinner and headed to Itaewon a mile and half away, listening to communications on the police radio along the way.</p> <p>Traffic was heavy, and after an hour in the car, he decided to get out and walk, his gait casual with his hands behind his back, according to surveillance camera footage. He later said during a parliamentary hearing that he was unaware of the crisis unfolding until he reached Itaewon at 11 p.m.</p> <p>"I feel so miserable," Mr. Lee said. "I will be guilty before the victims and their families as long as I live."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 UK MI5: China long-term spy recruitment
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/nov/17/british-spy-chief-says-chinese-engaged-long-term-a/
GIST	<p>Britain's domestic intelligence chief is warning that Chinese intelligence agents are grooming British citizens as spies as part of influence operations that can stretch over years and even decades.</p> <p>Ken McCallum, director general of the intelligence service known as MI5, said recently in his annual update on threats to Britain that Chinese intelligence operations pose one of the major threats to national and economic security, including to the political system.</p> <p>"We see the Chinese authorities playing the long game in cultivating contacts to manipulate opinion in China's favor — seeking to co-opt and influence not just prominent parliamentarians from across the political landscape, but people much earlier in their careers in public life, gradually building a debt of obligation," Mr. McCallum said.</p> <p>In January, MI5 revealed that a Chinese agent identified as Christine Ching Kui Lee had established ties with current and aspiring members of Parliament as part of an influence operation. The activities included giving donations to politicians.</p> <p>The British case is similar to that of a Chinese agent known as Fang Fang who worked with Rep. Eric Swalwell, California Democrat, and other U.S. political figures. Mr. Swalwell, a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, denied passing any sensitive information to the agent.</p> <p>Unlike MI5, the FBI made no public statement on the case of Ms. Fang.</p> <p>Mr. McCallum, speaking Wednesday at the spy agency's Thames House headquarters in London, told reporters that China's espionage activities "pose the most game-changing strategic challenge to the U.K."</p> <p>"We're seeing an increasingly assertive Chinese Communist Party using overt and covert pressure to bend other countries to its will," he said. The West is facing "a contest in which our security, values and democratic institutions are at stake."</p> <p>Chinese technology and information theft operations target intelligence officers, cyberhackers, business executives and academic researchers with access to government and private-sector secrets, he said.</p>

Mr. McCallum cited disclosures of Chinese activities last summer. “Since then, we’ve seen yet more concerning activity,” he said.

Chinese agents are using covert operations to monitor and in some cases intimidate overseas Chinese deemed to be opposed to the ruling Communist Party, the British spymaster said.

“This takes place all over the world, from coercing and forcibly repatriating Chinese nationals to harassment and assault,” Mr. McCallum said.

In one recent case, a pro-democracy demonstrator was attacked outside the Chinese Consulate in Manchester. Press reports also have detailed Beijing’s global network of overseas police offices used to target dissidents.

The Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department and other front groups “apply pressure to those challenging the regime’s perceived ‘core interests’ — whether that’s on democracy in Hong Kong or human rights abuses in Xinjiang,” the MI5 director said. “We can expect it to increase further as [Chinese President Xi Jinping] consolidates power on an indefinite basis.”

The British government recently announced the creation of an interagency task force focused on protecting democratic institutions and freedoms.

Targeted before

British intelligence was famously the target of a long-term spy penetration in the 1950s, when senior British intelligence officer Kim Philby oversaw a ring of agents for the Soviet Union and nearly became head of the foreign intelligence service known as MI6.

Philby escaped to Moscow in 1963 before he could be arrested. He was part of a Soviet spy ring known as the Cambridge Five, named for the university where five members of the British upper class were recruited as spies in the 1930s.

In Washington, FBI Director Christopher A. Wray repeated a warning to Congress this week that Chinese intelligence activities pose “the greatest long-term threat to our nation’s ideas, innovation, and economic security.”

“When it comes to economic espionage, [China] uses every means at its disposal against us, blending cyber, human intelligence, diplomacy, corporate transactions and pressure on U.S. companies operating in China to achieve its strategic goals to steal our companies’ innovations,” Mr. Wray said.

As in Britain, Chinese intelligence is using human agents and “co-optees” to corrupt corporate insiders. Beijing agents also rely on sophisticated cyberintrusions, pressure on U.S. companies in China, shell game corporate transactions and suspect joint venture partnerships, he said.

“There’s also nothing traditional about the scale of their theft. It’s unprecedented in the history of the FBI,” Mr. Wray said in prepared testimony to the House and Senate homeland security committees. “American workers and companies are facing a greater, more complex danger than they’ve ever dealt with before.”

The FBI also is leading an interagency counterspy group called the National Counterintelligence Task Force, which seeks to apply “a whole-of-government approach to counterintelligence,” he said. The task force combines the authority and operational capabilities of all U.S. intelligence agencies with federal, state, and local law enforcement and local task forces in FBI field offices.

On the threat from Russia, Mr. McCallum said Britain played a key role in the recent expulsions of Russian officials around the world, including more than 600 from Europe. Among them, he said, were more than 400 spies.

	<p>“This has struck the most significant strategic blow against the Russian intelligence services in recent European history,” he said.</p> <p>A total of 23 Russian spies working undercover as diplomats were ordered out of Britain, and another 100 Russians seeking diplomatic visas were blocked on national security grounds, he said.</p> <p>Russian intelligence operatives were blamed for the attempted assassination by poisoning of former Russian military officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia Skripal, in 2018 in Salisbury. Moscow agents also were identified in the London killing of Russian intelligence defector Alexander Litvinenko in 2006, using a radioactive agent known as Polonium-210 that was placed in a cup of tea.</p> <p>Mr. McCallum said in his remarks this week that Russia and China present different kinds of threats to Western interests and values. He used a soccer analogy on the eve of the start of the 2022 World Cup.</p> <p>Russia, he said, even though bogged down by the war in Ukraine, “thinks nothing of throwing an elbow in the face, and routinely cheats to get its way. We’ve had success in getting some of their players sent off, and for now they’re a bit distracted by the blame game in their own dressing room, but they will keep attacking us.”</p> <p>“The Chinese authorities present a different order of challenge,” he said. “They’re trying to rewrite the rulebook, to buy the league, to recruit our coaching staff to work for them.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 CEO: Amazon layoffs will extend into 2023
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/business/article/Amazon-CEO-says-layoffs-will-extend-into-next-year-17593613.php
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — The mass layoffs that began in Amazon's corporate ranks this week will extend into next year, CEO Andy Jassy said Thursday.</p> <p>In a note sent to employees, Jassy said the company told workers in its devices and books divisions about layoffs on Wednesday. He said it also offered some other employees a voluntary buyout offer.</p> <p>“I’ve been in this role now for about a year and a half, and without a doubt, this is the most difficult decision we’ve made during that time (and, we’ve had to make some very tough calls over the past couple of years, particularly during the heart of the pandemic),” Jassy wrote in the memo.</p> <p>Seattle-based Amazon, which has been cutting costs in various areas of its business in the past few months, is undergoing an annual review process to figure out where it can save more money. Jassy said this year’s review is “more difficult” due to the economic landscape and the company’s rapid hiring in the last several years.</p> <p>Other tech companies — many of which had gone on hiring binges in the past few years — have also been trimming their workforce amid concerns about an economic slowdown. Among others, Facebook parent Meta said last week it would lay off 11,000 people, about 13% of its workforce. And Elon Musk, the new Twitter CEO, has slashed the company’s workforce in half this month.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Amazon notified authorities in California that it would lay off about 260 corporate workers at various facilities in the state. The company has not publicly disclosed how many employees it laid off this week across its entire corporate workforce, though some based in Seattle said they've also been let go.</p> <p>Jassy said the company hasn’t concluded how many other jobs will be impacted. He noted there will be reductions in certain divisions as the company goes through the annual review process, which will continue into next year. As they weigh job cuts, he said leaders at the company will prioritize what matters most to customers and the long-term health of the company.</p>

	Amazon is offering severance packages for employees who leave the company. But — unlike Meta, for example — it hasn't publicly provided details of the package.
	The company employs more than 1.5 million workers globally, primarily made up of hourly workers.
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HEADLINE	11/17 Seattle reset: 5,900 tech jobs already gone
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/with-5900-tech-jobs-already-gone-a-seattle-correction-looks-real/
GIST	<p>The string of layoff announcements by Amazon and other Seattle-area tech employers has many asking whether the tech industry is bound for a major correction and even more job cuts in coming months. In fact, that correction may already be underway.</p> <p>Last month, employers in Washington's information sector shed 5,900 jobs, according to the October employment report by the Employment Security Department.</p> <p>That's one of the largest monthly declines in state history. While it's still too soon to know how bad things might get, the losses so far are already a poignant reminder that tech's pandemic boom "wasn't necessarily sustainable," said Anneliese Vance-Sherman, a regional economist at ESD who covers the Seattle area.</p> <p>The October report wasn't all bad news. Tech's woes don't seem to have infected the rest of the job market, which still managed a net gain of 5,400 jobs in October. Hotels, restaurants and other leisure and hospitality businesses led the way, with 4,400 new jobs, and even the construction industry, despite a cooling housing market, grew by 700 jobs.</p> <p>While the state's unemployment rate ticked up from 3.7% to 3.8%, Washington hasn't seen an alarming surge in unemployment claims. Just over 5,800 Washingtonians applied for benefits last week, according to data posted Thursday. That's up 28% over the October weekly average, but not out of line with seasonal patterns, and is still 23% fewer than applied during the same week in 2019.</p> <p>But those encouraging trends aren't likely to hold. October's tech losses didn't include all of the roughly 12,500 layoffs recently announced at Amazon, Meta, Convoy, Zillow, Redfin and other tech firms.</p> <p>That's partly because October's numbers came from a mid-month survey, before more recent layoffs had been announced. As important, the "information" category includes jobs at employers such as Microsoft and Meta, but excludes some tech-related jobs at other employers, such as Amazon, which is classified as a retailer, and Zillow and Redfin, which are classified as real estate companies, said Vance-Sherman.</p> <p>October's losses also don't include any of the contractor positions eliminated during that period, said ESD economist Paul Turek.</p> <p>All told, Washington looks set to lose as many as 18,000 tech or tech-related jobs over barely two months. That's more than the state lost in the dot-com bust of 2001-03, when many overvalued online startups collapsed and thousands of workers found themselves without jobs.</p> <p>Those historical comparisons come with important caveats.</p> <p>Today's losses are coming in a tech sector that is much larger. The 18,000-job decline would represent less than 4% of the current tech workforce. Losses in dot-com bust represented around 10.5% of the sector workforce.</p> <p>As important, many experts regard the dot-com bust an unavoidable correction after years of overzealous hiring and unrealistic business expectations.</p>

By contrast, the pandemic hiring boom reflected strong demand for tech products by consumers isolating at home and employers rolling out remote work.

Though demand wasn't sustainable at those levels, the industry is still selling a lot of those services, which makes it hard to forecast how long tech layoffs will continue.

For example, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said on Thursday that the 10,000 announced layoffs will continue into 2023, meaning some may have to wait months to know if their jobs are safe.

The temptation to use historical trends to "figure out what the future is going to look like ... misses the mark quite a bit because this is something completely different," Vance-Sherman said.

One major unknown: whether the Seattle-area can absorb all the laid-off workers, or whether some may need to switch to other industries or other locations.

Some employment and recruiting experts think layoffs by Amazon and other big-name Seattle-area tech employers will allow smaller tech employers to finally hire enough talent.

But some workers actually in the job market question whether smaller employers have the budget to hire so many soon-to-be-available workers, especially for the highly specialized, highly paid roles common in the Seattle area.

Nadir Khan, a former AWS employee, said the offers he's received are all out of state, and are all for less than he was making at Amazon.

"If you're being paid a lot at a big tech company and ... you do get laid off, it's very likely you're going to be making less money," Khan said.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Fire near Neah Bay prompts evacuations
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/fire-near-neah-bay-prompts-evacuations-school-closures/
GIST	<p>NEAH BAY, Wash. (AP) — A wildfire at the far northwestern tip of the Olympic Peninsula prompted more than 100 people to evacuate neighborhoods in Neah Bay on Thursday, and nearby schools have closed.</p> <p>The fire is burning on the remote Makah Indian reservation near Hobuck Lake, Makah Tribal Chairman T.J. Greene told the Peninsula Daily News. He said residents reported the blaze to emergency dispatchers in the morning when embers began falling near the lake. Greene said the cause was not known.</p> <p>Evacuation was recommended for area residents and the Makah Community Gym was opened as a shelter. Greene said no one has been injured.</p> <p>Cape Flattery School District Superintendent Michelle Parkin said Neah Bay's elementary, junior high and senior high schools were closed Thursday and would be closed Friday.</p> <p>The Cape Flattery Trail and the Hobuck Campground were closed. Greene said campers were evacuated.</p> <p>The state Department of Natural Resources said the Hobuck Fire is made up of three active wildland fires: Hobuck Lake, The Cape and Johnny's Junction.</p> <p>"It fully engulfed the hillside. The flames could be seen for miles," Greene said.</p> <p>The state Department of Natural Resources has about 60 personnel on-site plus two helicopters for water drops, although winds Thursday had kept them grounded, Greene said.</p> <p>Neah Bay saw a peak gust of 52 miles per hour (84 kilometers per hour) Thursday, KING 5 reported.</p>

HEADLINE	11/17 Bloodworks Northwest urgent donor plea
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/bloodworks-northwest-makes-urgent-call-for-donors/
GIST	<p>Blood donations are in great demand in the Northwest as some supplies drop to critically low levels, threatening to impact trauma and cancer patients before Thanksgiving.</p> <p>Bloodworks Northwest has almost 7,000 vacant time slots for blood donations until early next month. You can schedule a donation and find more information at bloodworksnw.org/donate or by calling 800-398-7888. A list of donor centers and pop-up sites is also available on the organization's website.</p> <p>Bloodworks Northwest says it provides 95% of the blood supply for hospitals in the Pacific Northwest. Blood usage among local hospitals has increased 15% in the past four weeks, the drive said, but blood donations are a thousand shy of the typical count. Local hospitals are hovering "between critical and emergency," according to a Wednesday news release.</p> <p>While donations of all blood types have dipped, the supply of Type O blood has dropped the most with a 40% reduction in recent weeks, leaving the organization with less than a 24-hour supply.</p> <p>"This is a reminder that even as our lives get busy, it takes 1,000 donations a day, every day, to meet the local needs of trauma, cancer and surgery patients," said co-chief medical officer Kirsten Alcorn. "As you're making holiday plans, please take one hour to give blood."</p> <p>The organization is encouraging new and returning blood and platelet donors to book appointments, as well as reminding donors to keep appointments or call to reschedule if you are feeling unwell. People can donate blood 10 days after COVID-19 symptoms resolve, according to Bloodworks. COVID and flu vaccinations do not affect your ability to donate blood.</p> <p>Before your appointment, donors are urged to drink water, eat healthily and wear a shirt with sleeves that are short or can be rolled up. You'll need a reservation and photo identification.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Audit criticizes govt's homeless response
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/wa-audit-governments-lack-data-driven-approach-in-homelessness-response/
GIST	<p>To make progress on reducing homelessness, local governments need to rely more on data to make decisions and do a better job of monitoring — and correcting — the nonprofits and organizations they contract with, according to a new report by the Washington State Auditor's Office.</p> <p>The performance report is the second time the state auditor has taken a deep dive in reviewing efforts to address the growing problem of homelessness in Washington.</p> <p>The 18-month review was originally inspired by a Seattle resident who called into the state auditor's hotline to pitch the idea.</p> <p>"Washingtonians are growing more frustrated and concerned as the number of people living on the streets and in encampments continues to grow, even as government spends more on programs to address homelessness," the audit says.</p> <p>The report focused on Seattle, Spokane, Yakima County and Snohomish County.</p> <p>Rather than use the data they collect each time someone comes into a food bank, shelter, hospital or police station to prioritize services, the four local governments more often used homelessness boards and people</p>

with lived experience, grant funding requirements, and elected leaders to guide their homelessness strategies.

There is much on the line with these decisions.

As of January 2020, the state had more than 22,000 homeless residents, according to an estimate by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Washington local governments spent \$357 million on homeless services in 2021. About a third of it, \$133 million, came from federal dollars, according to this week's audit. During the pandemic, the federal government made historic one-time investments in helping state and local governments boost their homelessness responses.

Much of that money is paid to nonprofits that provide a variety of services to help homeless people find food or shelter, register for identification, or get on a list to try to qualify for permanent housing.

The audit said when these service providers performed poorly, government departments rarely took action to address it.

"When the goals set for contractors providing services are not met, we need to hold them accountable," said Jenn Cerecedes, director of Spokane's Community, Housing, and Human Services Department.

She agreed with Mary Jane Brell-Vujovic, who leads Snohomish County's homelessness response as director of Human Services, who said the report is a reminder that local governments can always do a better job of documenting their work with providers, communicating expectations and monitoring provider performance.

When it comes to how to handle homelessness service providers that aren't meeting their contracted goals, the audit recommends that "holding contracted providers accountable is both feasible and necessary to reduce homelessness, even in the face of external factors."

Several government leaders said in the report that becomes a challenge when homelessness service providers see such high turnover numbers and when few organizations offer the services they need.

Brell-Vujovic said that while the audit makes some helpful recommendations, it doesn't take into account outside factors, such as a growing affordable housing crisis, that contribute to homelessness over time even as investments in addressing the issue increase.

"Do I think it's going to have a profound impact on homelessness? I do not," Brell-Vujovic said.

Seattle's Human Services Department staff outlined why city responses aren't always as data-driven as the audit proposes they should be.

City staff told auditors their recommendations weren't always enough to sway policymakers. Because the mayor's office approves the department's proposed funding plan and the City Council ultimately decides how much it receives, the department's priorities aren't always funded the way they would like.

According to the report, Seattle and Yakima County both spend more on shelter, which is not shown to end homelessness, and services that meet other basic needs than permanent housing for people with little to no income.

"Ending homelessness and providing affordable housing is a top priority of the city of Seattle," said Kevin Mundt, spokesperson for the city of Seattle.

Mundt said the State Auditor's Office's accounting doesn't entirely add up because most of the city's investment in housing comes from the Office of Housing, not the Human Services Department. Between

	<p>2017 and 2021, the Office of Housing invested more than \$200 million in affordable housing for people exiting homelessness, according to Mundt.</p> <p>Yakima County started managing a countywide homelessness program in 2019. During the time of the audit, the county had only two staff members to oversee the work, and much of their time was spent distributing rental assistance, according to the report.</p> <p>The audit will be presented Nov. 30 to Washington's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, according to Sohara Monaghan, senior performance auditor for the state, who worked on the report.</p> <p>The four audited governments will be invited to attend the event and share their views and plans for implementing the report's recommendations.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Covid mutations: fewer ways to treat virus
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/covids-mutations-leave-doctors-with-far-fewer-ways-to-treat-virus/
GIST	<p>Bloomberg - COVID-19's constant mutations have proved nearly impossible for drugmakers to keep up with. Omicron's newest stepchildren threaten to render the last two antibody drugs on the market ineffective: Eli Lilly & Co.'s bebtelovimab, which is used to treat symptoms, and AstraZeneca's Evusheld, which helps prevent infections.</p> <p>When COVID first hit, scientists quickly developed antibody drugs to protect people from the virus's worst effects. It's a straightforward premise: a targeted antibody can immediately neutralize a threat inside the body, preventing an infection from even starting.</p> <p>But with each new round of COVID mutations, various antibody drugs have been deemed ineffective and pulled off the market. And with very little progress in antibody drug development, it's quite possible doctors will soon have none to choose from.</p> <p>"Instead of having more options with these new variants, we're seeing less and less options," Florian Krammer, a virologist at Mount Sinai's Icahn School of Medicine said at a Galien Forum panel last month. "That's a big issue that I see for the coming 12 months."</p> <p>The problem is worldwide. U.K. health officials said Wednesday in updated draft guidance that Evusheld isn't recommended for COVID treatment due to uncertainty about its effectiveness against omicron. The only drugs still recommended for use are Pfizer Inc.'s Paxlovid antiviral; Lilly's Olumiant, subject to U.K. marketing authorization; and Roche Holding's RoActemra, according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. The guidance will not be finalized until 2023.</p> <p>With new variants such as BQ. 1 and BQ. 1.1 now accounting for the majority of COVID cases in the Northeast and other parts of the country, U.S. regulators say that Lilly's COVID drug is no longer a reliable treatment option for nearly half of the U.S. That's a problem heading into the winter as hospitals and doctors have been relying on antibodies to fight or prevent some severe infections.</p> <p>As a possible winter COVID surge looms, the Biden administration is asking Congress for \$9.25 billion to bolster the government's COVID efforts as part of a broader request for funding. More than half of that — \$5 billion — would be used to support development of next-generation vaccines and therapeutics to fight a broader swath of variants.</p> <p>Antibody therapies are essential for treating and preventing disease in roughly 7 million immune-compromised Americans, for whom vaccines and antivirals don't always work well. Before omicron's latest set of changes, just two COVID antibody drugs remained out of the five that have won FDA authorization.</p>

Regulators aren't nixing Astra's preventative or Lilly's antibody altogether, but rather suggesting doctors only use them in areas where older variants remain dominant. The FDA said the decision to administer Astra's treatment, for example, "should be based on the regional prevalence of the resistant subvariants, the individual patient's risks, the available resources, and logistics."

With new subvariants continuing to grow in prevalence across much of the U.S., as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show, monoclonal antibody effectiveness could become even further limited.

It's unlikely doctors will have new antibodies to work with anytime soon. Although some companies have products in various stages of development, none are close to an emergency use authorization that would see them become available this winter, according to Janice Reichert, executive director of the Antibody Society, a nonprofit trade association that tracks antibody-related research.

"It's not clear how many companies are really committed to moving them forward," Reichert said in an email. The virus's frequent mutations and the length of the FDA authorization process have deterred companies from developing new antibodies, experts said, because by the time drugs are approved, new, more immune-evasive mutations have likely already begun circulating.

The FDA declined to comment on discussions with companies about the status of their antibody drugs and whether it was considering issuing any new emergency use authorizations. The Antibody Society's COVID-19 biologics tracker does not show any products that have reached that stage in the development process.

Omicron's first iteration wiped out GSK and Vir Biotechnology's drug, sotrovimab, as well as one made by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. Vir, alongside GSK, is still evaluating sotrovimab's efficacy against emerging variants, like BQ. 1 and BQ. 1.1, the company said in an email. A spokesperson also said that Vir has "identified several highly potent next generation" antibodies that have shown activity against all COVID variants tested to date, including BQ. 1.1. Regeneron has also said it was working on next generation antibodies against current and future variants.

Lilly said in a statement that it continues to assess its drug bebtelovimab against emerging variants. During an earnings call earlier this month, Chief Scientific Officer Daniel Skovronsky said the company also has potentially broadly neutralizing antibodies in its labs that it would consider bringing forward "if there is a need and an aligned path forward with health authorities."

During the same call, however, executives said that antibodies will not be a major driver of long-term growth for the company.

Currently, most monoclonal antibodies target COVID's receptor binding domain, the part of the spike protein that latches directly onto human cells. But that region has been under tremendous pressure from both treatments and vaccines, making it a likely site for new mutations. Two other regions of the spike protein that have been shown to play a role in immune responses of people who have recovered from COVID could be new targets for antibodies.

Closely held Generate Biomedicines Inc. is developing a treatment targeted at a different region of the spike protein to see if it can build a more potent antibody that could be combined with other therapies. But that's not likely to come in time for a winter surge: The Boston-based company is planning to start testing its product in humans in 2023.

White House COVID Response Coordinator Ashish Jha said this week that without government support, next-generation vaccines and treatments could take 5 to 10 years to develop. While the administration is requesting additional funding to help with development, securing that money will likely continue to be an uphill battle in Congress.

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/ordinance-federal-way-outlaws-pushing-shopping-carts-sidewalks/281-d14dcb67-2932-441d-b745-0c492b234c7c
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — Federal Way City Council Members voted 5-2 to amend the city's shopping cart ordinance on Tuesday.</p> <p>The change will make it illegal for people to push or possess a shopping cart on sidewalks or places that obstruct right of way.</p> <p>Council member Jack Walsh, who proposed the change, says shopping cart theft and abandonment is an issue in the city. He said many members of the public came to him about the issue and that he met with the general managers of seven or eight large stores in the area before proposing the changes.</p> <p>"Shopping cart theft is so big that we have somebody whose entire job is collecting the shopping carts," said Council Member Walsh.</p> <p>He said most people pushing carts on the sidewalks are homeless.</p> <p>"It's a largely a homeless population that many of them have addictions or mental health problems," said Walsh. "And it's really not compassionate to them to encourage that lifestyle."</p> <p>But two council members, including Hoang Tran who used to be homeless, voted against the ordinance. Council Member Lydia Assefa-Dawson voted against the ordinance as well.</p> <p>"I feel like we are targeting a group of vulnerable people in the community," said Council Member Tran during the November 15 meeting. "I feel like this ordinance is intended to drive homeless people out of the city without providing any meaningful help."</p> <p>Officers from the Special Operations Unit of Federal Way Police will be enforcing the law. If someone breaks it, they will face a civil infraction, owe \$50 and have to go to community court.</p> <p>"We're not trying to penalize those who are who have the carts," said Walsh. "We're trying to reduce theft, make the city more attractive, and encourage those people to receive services as well."</p> <p>The ordinance allows for the cart and its belongings to be confiscated, but Walsh said ideally police would have bags and those people could keep their belongings.</p> <p>"If they're not able to take their belongings, then we would go ahead and store their belongings for them, for I think up to 90 days for them to come and retrieve their belongings," said Walsh.</p> <p>The cost of enforcing this amended ordinance will be \$250,000 per year, but Walsh believes it will cost less and says the cost is expected to go down each year.</p> <p>The ordinance will go into effect in just less than a month.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 NATO exercise: 5 aircraft carriers
SOURCE	https://news.usni.org/2022/11/17/5-aircraft-carriers-set-to-operate-together-in-europe-for-nato-exercise
GIST	<p>U.S. aircraft carriers USS <i>George H.W. Bush</i> (CVN-77) and USS <i>Gerald R. Ford</i> (CVN-78) will exercise with aircraft carriers from France, Italy and the United Kingdom as part of a joint operation across Europe meant to show NATO interoperability, the Pentagon announced Thursday.</p> <p>The two American carrier strike groups, their embarked air wings and escorts will be operating in the North Atlantic Ocean, North Sea and Mediterranean Sea along with the U.K. Royal Navy's HMS <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> (R08), Italian carrier ITS <i>Cavour</i> (CVH 550) and the French FS <i>Charles de Gaulle</i> (R 91), Sabrina Singh, deputy Pentagon press secretary, told reporters Thursday.</p>

“These operations present an opportunity for allied nations to coordinate critical combat power throughout the Euro-Atlantic area while showcasing NATO cohesion and interoperability,” Singh said. “It is also an opportunity to test allied cooperation and to practice NATO’s deter and defend concepts across all geographic areas, operational domains and functional areas of the alliance.”

Singh referred questions about the joint operations to U.S. European Command.

The George H.W. Bush CSG has been operating in the Mediterranean since August when it replaced the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group. *Bush* and USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75) operated together briefly before *Truman* returned home to Norfolk, Va., the [first time two U.S. aircraft carriers](#) were in the Mediterranean together in several years. During its deployment, *Truman* exercised with *Charles de Gaulle* and *Cavour*.

As of Thursday afternoon, *Ford* was off Portsmouth, England, according to local ship spotters.

Charles de Gaulle departed France on Nov. 15 as part of Mission Antares, according to a French news release. The mission includes 3,000 service members from France and partners.

As part of Mission Antares, the French carrier will operate with ships from the Hellenic, Italian and American navies, according to the release.

Queen Elizabeth has largely taken over the operations for HMS *Prince of Wales* (R09), which is undergoing a repair to its propulsion system, [USNI News previously reported](#). *Queen Elizabeth* stepped in for some of *Prince of Wales*’ port visits, including to New York, before it shipped out for a planned deployment in the Atlantic.

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HEADLINE	11/17 L.A. Co. ‘strongly recommending’ masks
SOURCE	https://deadline.com/2022/11/los-angeles-strongly-recommending-masks-variants-bq1-bq1-1-cases-rise-1235175595/
GIST	<p>With Covid daily cases up 52% since the beginning of November, Los Angeles County today returned to “strongly recommending” that people wear masks in all indoor public settings.</p> <p>The recommendation falls short of a mandate, but masks are still required indoors at health-care and congregate-care facilities, for anyone exposed to the virus in the past 10 days, and at locations where they are required by the operator, county Health Officer Dr. Muntu Davis said.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the county reported another 2,215 infections. Today, it was 1,949. The seven-day average daily rate of people testing positive for the virus was 6.8%, up from 5.6% a week ago.</p> <p>Davis said the county is currently reporting a 7-day average of about 1,500 new cases per day, up from 1,300 per day a week ago and up 52% since Nov. 1. He noted that the reported cases only represent a portion of actual infections occurring in the county, since many residents rely on at-home tests that are not reported to health officials, while many more don’t get tested at all.</p> <p>Of concern is the rapid rise of two new variants, BQ1 & BQ1.1. Last week, one or the other was detected in 17% of all infections analyzed in L.A. This week, that combined percentage stands at 26%.</p> <p>Per the CDC, BQ1 & BQ1.1 now total 44% of specimens analyzed in the region comprised of California, Nevada and Arizona.</p> <p>For the past few months, indoor masking has been a matter of personal preference, unless individual businesses or locations chose to require them. The county shifted back to “strongly recommending” indoor mask wearing on Thursday when the local seven-day average of daily new infections rose to 100 per</p>

100,000 residents, up from 86 per 100,000 a week ago. The rate the previous week was 65 per 100,000 residents.

“Now it is strongly recommended that all individuals wear a high- quality mask that fits well in the following settings: in public indoor spaces; when using public transit, including buses, ride-shares, taxis and medical transport; correctional and detention facilities; and homeless and emergency shelters,” said Davis.

The increasing case rate mirrored steady rises seen in daily reported case numbers and hospitalizations since the beginning of November.

Average daily Covid-related hospital admissions are averaging 97 per day, up 26% from 77 per day last week, and a 54% jump since Nov. 1.

As of Thursday, the number of Covid-positive patients in county hospitals rose to 648, up from 589 the previous day. Of those patients, 77 were being treated in intensive care, up from 75 a day earlier.

Health officials have said previously that roughly 40% of the patients were actually admitted for Covid-related issues, while the rest were admitted for other reasons but tested positive at the hospital.

Daily reported virus-related deaths remain relatively low, at about eight per day, but Davis said with the increases in case rates and hospitalizations, that number could begin to climb.

Health officials have been warning of a third straight winter surge of Covid cases, noting the increased risk of transmission as people spend more time indoors due to colder weather and the winter holidays. Davis on Thursday also noted the continued threat of new variants emerging that can spread more rapidly from person to person, even those who are vaccinated.

A recent Harvard University study of Massachusetts school districts following the lifting of mask mandates on campuses found that districts lifting mask mandates had a COVID infection rate of 128 per 1,000 people, while those with masking had a rate of 66 per 1,000.

Another nine virus-related fatalities were reported Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	11/18 IAEA orders Iran to cooperate
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/u-n-nuclear-agency-orders-iran-cooperate-new-atomic-deal-looks-less-likely
GIST	<p>The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, has voted to order Iran to cooperate with the agency's investigation into uranium traces found at three undeclared sites as a nuclear deal with the country appears to be less and less certain.</p> <p>The resolution drafted by the United States, Britain, France and Germany says the board "decides it is essential and urgent" that Iran explain the origin of the uranium particles and more generally give the IAEA all the answers it requires.</p> <p>"Iran must now provide the necessary cooperation, no more empty promises," the United States said in its statement to the board shortly before the resolution was adopted with 26 votes in favor, five abstentions and two countries absent, according to diplomats in the meeting. Only Russia and China voted against.</p> <p>The resolution is not the first time the board has passed action against Iran, but the current resolution contains stronger wording that hints at possible diplomatic escalation down the line.</p> <p>One possible action the board could take in the future is a referral to the U.N. Security Council (UNSC), said Behnam Ben Taleblu, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, to Fox News Digital.</p>

"Firmer language from the IAEA board about Iranian failures to explain traces of man-made uranium particles at past nuclear sites can serve as a potential glide path for UNSC referral, something Tehran has long sought to avoid through half measures and empty promises of cooperation," Taleblu said.

Taleblu explained that "censuring Iran over these shortcomings has to be the price floor" rather than a price ceiling of a new "pressure-based approach to countering Tehran's nuclear infractions."

"If transparency and cooperation are not forthcoming, then for the sake of the integrity of the global nonproliferation regime, Tehran must face consequences," Taleblu added. "This includes exercising the 'snapback' option baked into the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)."

The move by the IAEA comes as talks with a nuclear deal have stalled and Robert Malley, U.S. envoy for Iran affairs, [said last month](#) that it will not "waste time" on trying to revive talks with Iran in light of Tehran's brutal crackdown on antigovernment protesters and its support of Russia in its war against Ukraine.

Over the summer, Iranian officials rejected an EU proposal and made more demands in late August and early September. Since that time, anti-government protests have [broken out in Iran](#) in response to the police custody death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who had been detained by Iran's morality police in September for not properly covering her hair with the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab, which is mandatory for Iranian women.

Despite O'Malley saying earlier this week that the United States is continuing its strategy of "sanctions and pressure," an Iranian official said this week there is currently an "uninterrupted exchange of messages" between the two countries in terms of reviving the 2015 deal that was scrapped by former President Donald Trump, [Anadolu Agency reported](#) this week.

Lisa Daftari, an expert on [Iranian relations](#) and editor-in-chief of the Foreign Desk, told Fox News Digital that the recent IAEA development "calls into question" the Biden administration's approach to Iran and provides evidence that any nuclear deal would be a deal with a partner who has not shown reason to be trusted.

"To date, the Biden administration has been pressured to put the deal on hold both because of the demands of the regime but more so because of the young Iranian protesters' movement, which has been successful in gaining global attention," Daftari said. "A development like this once again underscores the importance of supporting the movement in Iran, which seeks to remove a government that cannot be trusted to lead its people or obtain nuclear weapons."

Taleblu told Fox News Digital that regardless of any resolution issued against Iran, the country's "nuclear advances and diplomatic intransigence are increasingly what is pouring cold water on the prospect of nuclear diplomacy with the Islamic Republic."

"After all, Western diplomats must be wondering, what is the point of such diplomacy with a regime that slaughters protesters, proliferates arms, underwrites wars of imperial aggression and continues to shun nuclear transparency?" he said.

The [White House](#) did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Fox News Digital.

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HEADLINE	11/18 NY state of emergency: dangerous storm
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/thunder-snow-hits-buffalo-area-at-start-of-monster-storm/
GIST	<i>Buffalo, N.Y.</i> — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency Thursday for parts of western New York ahead of a dangerous storm that had the potential to dump several feet of snow on some communities on the eastern ends of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

The worst snowfall was expected in Buffalo, where the National Weather Service said up to 4 feet might fall in some spots through Sunday, with periods of near-zero visibility. Other areas could get a foot or less of the lake-effect snow, which is caused by frigid air picking up copious amounts of moisture from the warmer lakes.

Snows began falling in Buffalo Thursday evening, and heavy snow punctuated by thunder and lightning -- so-called "thunder snow" -- moved in late Thursday and early Friday, quickly covering the ground and roads, as noted by the National Weather Service's Buffalo office:

There's an intense band of lake effect snow just south of downtown Buffalo across the Southtowns.

[CBS Buffalo affiliate WIVB-TV said](#) snow was already falling late Thursday night at the rate of 3 inches per hour with up to 5 inches per hour possible.

Hochul's state of emergency covers 11 counties and included a ban on commercial truck traffic from a stretch of Interstate 90. Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz issued a driving ban, as well.

Administrators canceled Friday classes for students in Buffalo and throughout the county. Amtrak stations in Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Depew closed Thursday and will stay closed Friday, The Buffalo News reported, while numerous flights in and out of Buffalo Niagara International Airport were canceled.

"I want western New Yorkers to take this seriously," Hochul said.

Also ahead of the storm, the NFL announced it would relocate the Buffalo Bills' Sunday home game against the Cleveland Browns to Detroit. The switch in sites means the Bills will play back-to-back games in Detroit, since they're scheduled to play the Lions on Thanksgiving.

The weather service also warned of accumulations of 2 feet or more of snow in northern New York on the eastern edge of Lake Ontario, and in parts of northern Michigan through Sunday.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Putin's inner-circle turning on him?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/signs-show-the-russian-security-service-is-turning-on-vladimir-putin?ref=home
GIST	<p>Nearly nine months into Russia's war against Ukraine, it seems some of Vladimir Putin's strongmen are laying the groundwork to abandon ship.</p> <p>A human rights group that works closely with Russian inmates and investigates abuses by the security services has reportedly received a flood of calls from members of those same security services desperately trying to flee.</p> <p>Gulagu.net, founded by Vladimir Osechkin, reports that the final straw appears to have been the brutal sledgehammer-execution video released by Russia's private army last week—a stomach-churning extrajudicial killing that the Kremlin politely averted its eyes from while the Putin-linked businessman thought to be behind it uses it for his own PR campaign.</p> <p>“The reprisal with the use of a sledgehammer and the cruelty of [Wagner Group founder Yevgeny] Prigozhin, with the tacit consent of Putin, had an unexpected effect: for the third day, there is a steady stream of messages to the Gulagu.net hotline from employees of the Interior Ministry, the [Investigative Committee], the FSB and the [Federal Protective Service], the Federal Bailiff Service, etc., who want to leave the territory of lawlessness and cruelty,” Gulagu.net reported.</p>

While rumblings of discontent among the Russian security services have been reported throughout the war, frustrations have reportedly boiled over as Putin is increasingly seen as losing all control.

In less than two weeks, there was [Russia's humiliating retreat from Kherson](#)—the Ukrainian territory that Putin and so many of his mouthpieces had vowed would be part of Russia “forever.” Then came the [brutal execution video](#) by members of the Wagner Group, the same private army that, by all accounts, has been entrusted with bringing victory to Putin by any means necessary.

(Despite mounting calls for an investigation into the execution, the Kremlin has dismissed it as “not our business,” leaving it to Wagner Group overlord Yevgeny Prigozhin to offer a flurry of fantastical explanations for the murder clearly aimed at trolling.)

And then came the Russian-made missile that landed in Poland this week, killing two farmers there shortly after similar missiles fired by Russia cut down Ukrainian civilians in the latest bombardment. While Western officials have since [walked back their claims](#) that the Polish farmers were killed by a missile fired by Russia, the incident initially seemed likely to trigger a direct confrontation between Russia's military and NATO forces.

And that reportedly left some within the Russian security services so shaken they were prepared to remove Putin from power entirely.

That's according to unconfirmed reporting by the Telegram channel General SVR, an anonymous channel that claims to be run by a former member of the security services.

“The incident with a missile hitting Poland on Tuesday almost became a prologue to the seizure of power in Russia,” the channel reported Thursday, claiming that high-ranking security officials had gathered in the immediate aftermath of the strike for “informal consultations.”

“Knowing Putin's penchant for raising the stakes through escalation... this group of security officials quickly became convinced that in response to a Russian strike on a country included in NATO there could be both a retaliatory strike and an ultimatum.”

So, according to the channel, they decided that “if the U.S. leadership and the adjoining countries show readiness for a harsh response, then the best way out would be to remove the current Russian president, Vladimir Putin, from power and create a collegial council of security officials to ‘temporarily’ take control of the country into their own hands ... blaming all the problems on either a seriously ill or law-breaking president.”

Noting that Putin has brought tension “to almost the limit,” the channel warned: “This time, the critical situation turned out to be illusory and it made no sense for the security forces to take risks, but next time, and there will be a next time, Putin may not have a chance.”

While panic over the missile incident has largely fizzled out, the same cannot be said for Prigozhin's growing influence in the war and role in the spotlight. A former member of the security services who fled the country told [Deutsche Welle](#) late last month that concerns were growing inside federal agencies about the power given to some figures within Putin's inner circle.

“The state is not thinking about its people, it's only thinking about itself and its close associates,” she said, describing them as “gangsters.”

Perhaps in a sign of things to come, Putin on Thursday seemed to signal he has no plans to listen to any of the more moderate figures who might caution him against escalation. Instead, he purged the Kremlin's Human Rights Council of all the experts who raised questions about the war and the public execution of defector Yevgeny Nuzhin, replacing them with a hardliner war reporter and other Kremlin loyalists.

	According to RTVI , citing a source in the human rights council, the head of the council is unlikely to seek an investigation into the sledgehammer killing or get involved in any way because he said that in times of war “anything can happen.”
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HEADLINE	11/17 Coal revival in Czech Republic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/high-energy-prices-lead-coal-revival-czech-republic-93542138
GIST	<p>OSTRAVA, Czech Republic -- In this part of northeastern Czech Republic, huge piles of coal are stacked up ready to sell to eager buyers and smoke belches from coal-fired plants that are ramping up instead of winding down.</p> <p>Ostrava has been working for decades to end its legacy as the most polluted area of the country, transitioning from an industrial working-class stronghold to a modern city with tourist sights. But Russia's war in Ukraine has triggered an energy crisis in Europe that has paved the way for coal's comeback, endangering climate goals and threatening health from increased pollution.</p> <p>Households and businesses are turning to the fuel once considered obsolete as they seek a cheaper option than natural gas, whose prices have surged as Russia slashed supplies to Europe.</p> <p>Demand for brown coal — the cheapest and most energy inefficient form — used by Czech households jumped by almost 35% in the first nine months of 2022 over a year earlier.</p> <p>In the same period, production rose more than 20%, the first increase after an almost continuous, decadeslong decline, the Czech Industry and Trade Ministry said.</p> <p>“We’re worried,” said Zdenka Němečková Crkvenjaš, who is responsible for environment as a member the governing council of the Moravian-Silesian region. “If the prices won’t go down, what might happen is that we’ll be facing an increased pollution.”</p> <p>The region is part of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin, a large industrialized area straddling the Czech-Polish border with rich deposits of coal and factories producing steel, power and the type of coal used for steel-making that date to the 19th century.</p> <p>A combination of burning coal for residential heating and industrial plants resulted in “catastrophic” air pollution at the end of the communist era in 1989, said Petr Jančík from Technical University Ostrava, an air pollution expert who cooperated on the Air Tritia project that recently produced an online model of the polluted air on the Czech-Polish-Slovak border.</p> <p>Coal-fired power is not only disastrous for climate, it’s also a health hazard, releasing heavy particle emissions, nitrogen oxides and mercury, which contaminates fish in lakes and rivers.</p> <p>A decline of industrial and mining activities and advent of new environmental standards after the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004 vastly improved air quality.</p> <p>But big challenges remain.</p> <p>Airborne dust emissions — PM10 particles — now meet environmental limits in the region, but concentrations of smaller PM2.5 particles that can reach deep into the lungs and bloodstream still do not hit World Health Organization standards.</p> <p>A 2021 study of more than 800 European cities by Spain’s Barcelona Institute for Global Health, or ISGlobal, puts the regional capital of Ostrava and the nearby towns of Karviná and Havířov among the top 10 most polluted European cities. It estimated that 529 deaths a year could be avoided in those three cities if air quality guidelines are met.</p>

Burning coal also spews the dangerous substance benzo(a)pyrene, whose levels are still high despite government programs that pay to replace old furnaces with more effective ones that reduce pollution.

Some 50,000 furnaces still need to be replaced in the Ostrava region, said Němečková Crkvenjaš, estimating that figure at 500,000 in a more populated and polluted area across the border in Poland.

"I'm afraid this winter won't be ideal as far the air pollution is concerned," she said. "I'll be delighted if I'm wrong."

Roman Vank, a board member for coal seller Ridera in Ostrava, said coal sales went up some 30% compared with last year. The cheapest form — brown coal — was most in demand.

Jančík, the scientist, said the impact to air quality is hard to predict right away, especially if it's another mild winter, and that pollution "might get only slightly worse."

He said a positive development is that high natural gas and electricity prices force people to acquire solar panels, more effective heating systems and try to become less dependent on sources of energy.

"There are two opposing trends: The first one is that people have been trying to use better and more efficient furnaces, and the second one is they consider using more coal and wood," Jančík said. "That's perhaps a result of a shock or worries, and they want to get supplies ready."

Czech Greenpeace spokesman Lukáš Hrábek expected a negative impact in the near future.

"We see conflicting trends right now. We see higher coal consumption, but at the same time, we see a massive investment in renewable energies, in heat pumps, in insulation," Hrábek said. "So it's hard to say what the long-term effect will be, but the short-term effect is quite obvious, the air pollution will be worse because of the higher coal consumption."

In another sign of coal's revival, the Czech Republic has reversed plans to completely halt mining near Ostrava to help safeguard power supplies amid the energy crunch.

The state-owned OKD company will extend its mining activities in in the Ostrava region until at least the end of next year, citing "enormous" demand. It will be mostly used for generating power and household heating, with coal-fired power plants producing almost 50% of the country's electricity.

The decision came after the European Union agreed to ban Russian coal starting in August over the war in Ukraine and as it works to reduce the bloc's energy ties to Russia.

The Czech government aims to phase out coal in energy production by 2033 and increase its reliance on nuclear power.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Human rights abuse widespread in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/thought-die-abuses-widespread-ukraine-93542920
GIST	<p>KYSELIVKA, Ukraine -- For 10 days, Alesha Babenko was locked in a basement and regularly beaten by Russian soldiers. Bound, blindfolded and threatened with electric shocks, the 27-year-old pleaded for them to stop.</p> <p>"I thought I was going to die," he told The Associated Press.</p> <p>In September, Babenko and his 14-year-old nephew, Vitaliy Mysharskiy, were arrested by Russian soldiers who occupied his village of Kyselivka in Ukraine's southern region of Kherson. They had been taking photos of destroyed tanks and sending them to the Ukrainian army.</p>

Seated this week on a bench outside his home, Babenko was visibly shaken as he recounted the trauma of being thrown into a car, driven to the city of Kherson and interrogated until he confessed.

As violence escalates in Ukraine, abuses perpetrated by Russia have become widespread, according to the United Nations and human rights groups. The situation is particularly concerning in the Kherson region, where hundreds of villages, including the main city, were liberated from Russian occupation in early November. It was one of Ukraine's biggest successes in the nearly 9-month-old war, dealing another stinging blow to the Kremlin.

The U.N. says it is attempting to verify allegations of nearly 90 cases of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions in Kherson, and is trying to understand if the scale of abuse is larger than already documented.

Ukrainian officials have opened more than 430 war crimes cases from the Kherson region and are investigating four alleged torture sites, Denys Monastyrskyi, Ukraine's minister of internal affairs, told state television.

Authorities have found 63 bodies bearing signs of torture near Kherson, Monastyrskyi said. He did not elaborate, saying the investigation into potential war crimes in the region was just beginning.

On Wednesday, Associated Press reporters saw the inside of one of these alleged torture sites in a police-run detention center in Kherson.

Russian soldiers appeared to have left hastily, leaving flags and portraits of Russian President Vladimir Putin scattered under broken glass on the floor. Neighbors described a steady flow of people in handcuffs being brought in, with bags over their heads. The ones who were allowed to leave walked out without shoes or personal effects.

Maksym Nehrov spent his 45th birthday in the jail, detained by Russians because he was a former soldier.

"The most terrifying thing was to hear other people being tortured all day," he said.

Walking along the corridor of the now-empty prison, he recalled that every time he somehow disobeyed the Russians they would hit him with an electric shock to the neck and head.

Throughout the war, liberated Ukrainian villages have revealed thousands of human rights atrocities perpetrated by Russian soldiers. Bodies were strewn across the streets in Bucha and Irpin, suburbs of the capital, Kyiv, after Russia withdrew in April.

Rights groups say it's too early to know if the abuses in Kherson were on the same level as in other liberated areas but that it's very likely.

"In all occupied areas that we've been able to access, we've documented incidents of torture, extrajudicial killings and torture. And we're very concerned Kherson will be no different," Belkis Wille, senior crisis and conflict researcher at Human Rights Watch, told the AP.

The group has documented unlawful attacks on civilians, torture and forcible disappearances of civilians in occupied areas around the country.

Since Russian forces pulled back on Nov. 10, residents in the nondescript town of Kyselivka who endured abuses are struggling to pick up the pieces of their lives.

After Babenko and his nephew returned home — at a time when his village was still under Russian occupation — he was too terrified to leave the house. He was haunted by what he'd endured. While

	<p>detained, Russian soldiers interrogated him repeatedly, kicking and punching his ribs, nose and stomach almost daily, he said.</p> <p>His young nephew escaped such abuse but was told he would become a Russian citizen and be protected. The two were released after confessing to what they'd done on video, they said.</p> <p>But others in their village haven't been as lucky.</p> <p>Two months ago, the godfather of Alla Protsenko's son was taken from his home by Russian soldiers and hasn't been seen since. Walking through the partially destroyed school where she used to teach before the Russians turned it into an army base, Protsenko said she has combed the country looking for him, to no avail.</p> <p>The last time the 52-year-old saw him was on her birthday, one week before he disappeared.</p> <p>"I remember him smiling as if to say: 'Hold on, everything will be fine,'" she said. "For me, he is still alive. I can't accept that now (perhaps), he is gone."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Australia commits to US nuclear subs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/australia-sticks-us-nuclear-subs-french-criticism-93538269
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Australia -- Australia's prime minister said Friday he remained committed to building a fleet of submarines powered by U.S. nuclear technology despite the French president describing the plan as a "confrontation with China."</p> <p>The previous Australian government infuriated President Emmanuel Macron last year by canceling a contract for a French-built fleet of conventionally-powered submarines worth 90 billion Australian dollars (\$66 billion) and opting instead for nuclear-powered versions in a deal secretly brokered with the United States and Britain.</p> <p>Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has stood by the so-called AUKUS agreement to embrace nuclear technology since he came to power at elections in May. Whether Australia opts for a version of the U.S. Virginia-class or British Astute-class submarine will be announced in March.</p> <p>"We are proceeding with the AUKUS arrangements, there's nothing ambiguous about it," Albanese told reporters at a Bangkok summit that Macron is also attending.</p> <p>Macron on Thursday criticized the AUKUS deal, telling reporters that France had offered Australia, which has no nuclear energy industry, diesel-electric subs that could be independently maintained.</p> <p>"It was not in a confrontation with China because these were not nuclear-powered submarines," Macron said through an interpreter.</p> <p>But Albanese's predecessor Prime Minister Scott Morrison chose the "exact opposite: To enter into a confrontation by going nuclear," Macron added.</p> <p>When the AUKUS deal was announced in September last year, China's foreign ministry condemned the export of U.S. nuclear technology as "highly irresponsible." Some of Australia's neighbors fear it could lead to an arms race in the region.</p> <p>Asked if Australia was creating a nuclear confrontation with China, Albanese replied: "President Macron is entitled to put forward his views, as he does in a very forthright way."</p> <p>"He's entitled to make whatever comments he wants as the leader of France," Albanese added.</p>

Albanese suggested there was no ill-feeling between the leaders, saying, “We had a very friendly exchange, as we always do” when they met Thursday night in Bangkok.

Last year, Macron accused Morrison of lying to him over the deal and refused to take the Australian leader’s phone calls for weeks after the contract for a dozen submarines was scrapped.

Macron on Thursday said the prospect of France supplying Australia with submarines remained “on the table.”

Albanese said Australia was continuing to discuss with France “how we can cooperate in defense.”

With the first of eight nuclear submarines not due to be delivered until 2040, Australia could face a capability gap as its Collins-class conventional submarines approach the end of their lives.

There has been speculation that France could provide Australia with a small interim fleet of diesel-electric subs.

Albanese’s newly elected government agreed in June to pay French shipbuilder Naval Group a compensatory 555 million euros (\$584 million) for breaking the submarine contract.

Australian Defense Department officials said at the time the compensation was generous in the hope of cooling French anger while enhancing security links between the two South Pacific powers.

Albanese said AUKUS was not brought up on Tuesday when he had his first bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Where's Putin? Ukraine bad news to others
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/putin-leader-leaves-bad-news-ukraine-93541512
GIST	<p>TALLINN, Estonia -- When Russia's top military brass announced in a televised appearance that they were pulling troops out of the key city of Kherson in southern Ukraine, one man missing from the room was President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>As Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Gen. Sergei Surovikin, Russia’s chief commander in Ukraine, stiffly recited the reasons for the retreat in front of the cameras on Nov. 9, Putin was touring a neurological hospital in Moscow, watching a doctor perform brain surgery.</p> <p>Later that day, Putin spoke at another event but made no mention of the pullout from Kherson — arguably Russia’s most humiliating withdrawal in Ukraine. In the days that followed, he hasn't publicly commented on the topic.</p> <p>Putin’s silence comes as Russia faces mounting setbacks in nearly nine months of fighting. The Russian leader appears to have delegated the delivery of bad news to others — a tactic he used during the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Kherson was the only regional capital Moscow’s forces had seized in Ukraine, falling into Russian hands in the first days of the invasion. Russia occupied the city and most of the outlying region, a key gateway to the Crimean Peninsula, for months.</p> <p>Moscow illegally annexed the Kherson region, along with three other Ukrainian provinces, earlier this year. Putin personally hosted a pomp-filled Kremlin ceremony formalizing the moves in September, proclaiming that “people who live in Luhansk and Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia become our citizens forever.”</p>

Just over a month later, however, Russia's tricolor flags came down over government buildings in Kherson, replaced with the yellow-and-blue banners of Ukraine.

The Russian military reported completing the withdrawal from Kherson and surrounding areas to the eastern bank of the Dnieper River on Nov. 11. Since then, Putin has not mentioned the retreat in any of his public appearances.

Putin “continues to live in the old logic: This is not a war, it is a special operation, main decisions are being made by a small circle of ‘professionals,’ while the president is keeping his distance,” political analyst Tatyana Stanovaya wrote in a recent commentary.

Putin, who was once rumored to personally supervise the military campaign in Ukraine and give battlefield orders to generals, appeared this week to be focused on everything but the war.

He discussed bankruptcy procedures and car industry problems with government officials, talked to a Siberian governor about boosting investments in his region, had phone calls with various world leaders and met with the new president of Russia's Academy of Science.

On Tuesday, Putin chaired a video meeting on World War II memorials. That was the day when he was expected to speak at the Group of 20 summit in Indonesia — but he not only decided not to attend, he didn't even join it by video conference or send a pre-recorded speech.

The World War II memorial meeting was the only one in recent days in which some Ukrainian cities — but not Kherson — were mentioned. After the meeting, Putin signed decrees awarding the occupied cities of Melitopol and Mariupol the title of City of Military Glory, while Luhansk was honored as City of Labor Merit.

Independent political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin attributed Putin's silence to the fact he has built a political system akin to that of the Soviet Union, in which a leader — or “vozhd” in Russian, a term used to describe Josef Stalin — by definition is incapable of making mistakes.

“Putin and Putin's system ... is built in a way that all defeats are blamed on someone else: enemies, traitors, a stab in the back, global Russophobia — anything, really,” Oreshkin said. “So if he lost somewhere, first, it's untrue, and second — it wasn't him.”

Some of Putin's supporters questioned such obvious distancing from what even pro-Kremlin circles viewed as a critical developments in the war.

For Putin to have phone calls with the leaders of Armenia and the Central African Republic at the time of the retreat from Kherson was more troubling than “the very tragedy of Kherson,” said pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov in a post on Facebook.

"At first, I didn't even believe the news, that's how incredible it was," Markov said, describing Putin's behavior as a “demonstration of a total withdrawal.”

Others sought to put a positive spin on the retreat and weave Putin into it. Pro-Kremlin TV host Dmitry Kiselev, on his flagship news show Sunday night, said the logic behind the withdrawal from Kherson was “to save people.”

According to Kiselev, who spoke in front of a large photo of Putin looking preoccupied with a caption saying, “To Save People,” it was the same logic the president uses — “to save people, and in specific circumstances, every person.”

That's how some ordinary Russians can view the retreat, too, analysts say.

	<p>“Given the growing number of people who want peace talks, even among Putin’s supporters, any such maneuver is taken calmly or even as a sign of a possible sobering up — saving manpower, the possibility of peace,” said Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment.</p> <p>For Russia's hawks — vocal Kremlin supporters who have been calling for drastic battlefield steps and weren’t thrilled about the Kherson retreat — there are regular barrages of missile strikes on Ukraine’s power grid, analyst Oreshkin said.</p> <p>Moscow launched one Tuesday. With about 100 missiles and drones fired at targets across Ukraine, it was the biggest attack to date on the country’s power grid and plunged millions into darkness.</p> <p>Oreshkin believes that such attacks don’t inflict too much damage onto Ukraine’s military and don’t change much on the battlefield.</p> <p>“But it is necessary to create an image of a victorious ‘vozhd.’ So it is necessary to carry out some kind of strikes and scream about them loudly. That’s what they’re doing right now, in my opinion,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Climate, politics shrivel Tigris-Euphrates
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/climate-politics-double-threat-tigris-euphrates-shrivels-93540084
GIST	<p>DAWWAYAH, Iraq and ILISU DAM, Turkey -- Next year, the water will come. The pipes have been laid to Ata Yigit’s sprawling farm in Turkey’s southeast connecting it to a dam on the Euphrates River. A dream, soon to become a reality, he says.</p> <p>Over 1,000 kilometers (625 miles) downstream in southern Iraq, nothing grows anymore in Obeid Hafez’s wheat farm. The water stopped coming a year ago, the 95-year-old said.</p> <p>The starkly different realities are playing out along the length of the Tigris-Euphrates river basin, one of the world’s most vulnerable. River flows have fallen by 40% in the past four decades as countries along its length — Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq — pursue rapid, unilateral development of the waters’ use.</p> <p>The drop is projected to worsen as temperatures rise from climate change. Both Turkey and Iraq, the two biggest consumers, acknowledge they must cooperate to preserve the river system. But a combination of political failures, mistrust and intransigence are conspiring to prevent a deal on sharing the rivers.</p> <p>The Associated Press conducted more than a dozen interviews in both countries, from top water envoys and senior officials to local farmers, and gained exclusive visits to controversial dam projects. Internal reports and revealed data illustrate the calculations driving disputes behind closed doors, from Iraq’s fears of a potential 20% drop in food production to Turkey’s struggles to balance Iraq’s and its own needs.</p> <p>“I don’t see a solution,” said former Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi.</p> <p>“Would Turkey sacrifice its own interests? Especially if that means that by giving more (water) to us, their farmers and people will suffer?”</p> <p>Turkey has been harnessing the river basin with a massive project to boost agriculture and generate hydroelectricity, the Southeast Anatolia Project, or GAP by its Turkish acronym. It has built at least 19 dams on the Euphrates and Tigris, with several more planned for a total of 22. The aim is to develop Turkey’s southeast, long an economic backwater.</p> <p>For the farmer, Yigit, the project will be transformative.</p> <p>Until now, his reliance on well water only permitted half his lands to be irrigated.</p>

But now that the irrigation pipes have reached his farm in Mardin province, his entire 4,500 acres will be watered next year via the Ataturk Dam on the Euphrates.

In contrast, Iraq — which relies on outside sources for nearly all its water — grows more worried with every drop diverted upstream.

In 2014, its Water Ministry prepared a confidential report warning that in two years, Iraq's water supply would no longer meet demand, and the gap would keep widening. The report, seen by the AP, said that by 2035, the water deficit would cause a 20% reduction in food production.

The report shows Iraqi officials knew how bleak the future would be without the recommended \$180 billion in investment in water infrastructure and an agreement with its neighbors. Neither has happened.

Decades of talks have still not found common ground on water-sharing.

Turkey approaches the water issue as if it were the river basin's benevolent owner, assessing needs and deciding how much to let flow downstream. Iraq considers ownership shared and wants a more permanent arrangement with defined portions.

In a rare interview, Turkey's envoy on water issues with Iraq, Veysel Eroglu, told the AP that Turkey cannot accept to release a fixed amount of water because of the unpredictability of river flows in the age of climate change.

Eroglu said Turkey could agree to setting a ratio to release — but only if Syria and Iraq provide detailed data on their water consumption.

“That is the only way to share water in an optimal and fair manner,” Eroglu said.

Iraq refuses to provide its consumption data. That's in part because it would show the widespread water waste in Iraq and the government weakness that makes managing water nearly impossible.

Government attempts at rationing the waning water causes outrage in southern Iraq. In August in southern Dhi Qar province, for example, tribal leader Sheikh Thamer Saeedi and dozens of protesters tried to divert water from a Tigris tributary to feed his barren lands after authorities failed to respond to his pleas for water.

The attempted diversion nearly sparked violence between local tribes before security forces intervened.

Iraq blames one Turkish infrastructure project in particular for these woes: the Ilusu Dam, on the Tigris.

Before Turkey began operating the dam in 2020, all the waters of Tigris flowed into Iraq. Now how much water comes down depends on Ankara's consideration of Iraq's month-to-month requests for a minimum flow, weighed against Turkey's own hydropower needs.

Turkey contends it is unfairly scapegoated. The AP was given an exclusive tour of the dam facility in October by Turkey's State Hydraulics Works, known by the Turkish acronym DSI, and given figures for the first time detailing flow rates and electricity production over two years.

A decade ago, Iraq received an average flow of 625 cubic meters of water per second from the Tigris. Today, the rate averages only 36% of that, Iraqi water ministry officials say.

Data provided by DSI shows that Turkey respected a request made by Iraq that it release at least 300 cubic meters per second down the Tigris during summer months when shortages are common.

But Iraqi officials say depending on such ad hoc arrangements make planning difficult.

	<p>“They can cut water, they can release water. We urgently need a water agreement just to satisfy Iraq’s minimum requirements,” said Hatem Hamid, head of the National Centre for Water Resources Management.</p> <p>For example, with dire shortages anticipated in 2022, Hamid cut the state agriculture water plan in half and reduced fresh water flows to Iraq's marshlands, to minimize salinity. But water-stressed Iran also diverted flows from tributaries feeding the marshes. The result was an environmental emergency and hundreds of dead livestock.</p> <p>Back in Obeid Hafez’s farm, the land is barren.</p> <p>Portraits of Hafez’s forefathers hang in his spartan living room. With his sons gone to seek work in the cities, there will be no one to till the land after him.</p> <p>“Life has ended here,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Biden shields Saudi crown prince in killing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/us-moves-shield-saudi-crown-prince-journalist-killing-93528846
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- The Biden administration declared Thursday that Saudi Arabia's crown prince should be considered immune from a lawsuit over his role in the killing of a U.S.-based journalist, a turnaround from Joe Biden's passionate campaign trail denunciations of Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the brutal slaying.</p> <p>The administration said the senior position of the crown prince, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler and recently named prime minister as well, should shield him against a suit brought by the fiancée of slain Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and by the rights group Khashoggi founded, Democracy for the Arab World Now.</p> <p>The request is non-binding and a judge will ultimately decide whether to grant immunity. But it is bound to anger human rights activists and many U.S. lawmakers, coming as Saudi Arabia has stepped up imprisonment and other retaliation against peaceful critics at home and abroad and has cut oil production, a move seen as undercutting efforts by the U.S. and its allies to punish Russia for its war against Ukraine.</p> <p>The State Department on Thursday called the administration's call to shield the Saudi crown prince from U.S. courts in Khashoggi's killing “purely a legal determination.”</p> <p>The State Department cited what it said was longstanding precedent. Despite its recommendation to the court, the State Department said in its filing late Thursday, it “takes no view on the merits of the present suit and reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of the heinous murder of Jamal Khashoggi.”</p> <p>Saudi officials killed Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. They are believed to have dismembered him, although his remains have never been found. The U.S. intelligence community concluded Saudi Arabia’s crown prince had approved the killing of the widely known and respected journalist, who had written critically of Prince Mohammed’s harsh ways of silencing of those he considered rivals or critics.</p> <p>The Biden administration statement Thursday noted visa restrictions and other penalties that it had meted out to lower-ranking Saudi officials in the death.</p> <p>“From the earliest days of this Administration, the United States Government has expressed its grave concerns regarding Saudi agents’ responsibility for Jamal Khashoggi’s murder,” the State Department said. Its statement did not mention the crown prince's own alleged role.</p> <p>Biden as a candidate vowed to make a “pariah” out of Saudi rulers over the 2018 killing of Khashoggi.</p>

“I think it was a flat-out murder,” Biden said in a 2019 CNN town hall, as a candidate. “And I think we should have nailed it as that. I publicly said at the time we should treat it that way and there should be consequences relating to how we deal with those — that power.”

But Biden as president has sought to ease tensions with the kingdom, including bumping fists with Prince Mohammed on a July trip to the kingdom, as the U.S. works to persuade Saudi Arabia to undo a series of cuts in oil production.

Khashoggi's fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, and DAWN sued the crown prince, his top aides and others in Washington federal court over their alleged roles in Khashoggi's killing. Saudi Arabia says the prince had no direct role in the slaying.

“It’s beyond ironic that President Biden has singlehandedly assured MBS can escape accountability when it was President Biden who promised the American people he would do everything to hold him accountable,” the head of DAWN, Sarah Leah Whitson, said in a statement, using the prince's acronym.

Biden in February 2021 had ruled out the U.S. government imposing punishment on Prince Mohammed himself in the killing of Khashoggi, a resident of the Washington area. Biden, speaking after he authorized release of a declassified version of the intelligence community's findings on Prince Mohammed's role in the killing, argued at the time there was no precedent for the U.S. to move against the leader of a strategic partner.

The U.S. military long has safeguarded Saudi Arabia from external enemies, in exchange for Saudi Arabia keeping global oil markets afloat.

“It’s impossible to read the Biden administration’s move today as anything more than a capitulation to Saudi pressure tactics, including slashing oil output to twist our arms to recognize MBS’s fake immunity ploy,” Whitson said.

A federal judge in Washington had given the U.S. government until midnight Thursday to express an opinion on the claim by the crown prince's lawyers that Prince Mohammed's high official standing renders him legally immune in the case.

The Biden administration also had the option of not stating an opinion either way.

Sovereign immunity, a concept rooted in international law, holds that states and their officials are protected from some legal proceedings in other foreign states’ domestic courts.

Upholding the concept of “sovereign immunity” helps ensure that American leaders in turn don’t have to worry about being hauled into foreign courts to face lawsuits in other countries, the State Department said.

Human rights advocates had argued that the Biden administration would embolden Prince Mohammed and other authoritarian leaders around the world in more rights abuses if it supported the crown prince's claim that his high office shielded him from prosecution.

Prince Mohammed serves as Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler in the stead of his aged father, King Salman. The Saudi king in September also temporarily transferred his title of prime minister — a title normally held by the Saudi monarch — to Prince Mohammed. Critics called it a bid to strengthen Mohammed’s immunity claim.

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HEADLINE	11/17 NKorea launches long-range ICBM 11/17 Japan: NKorea missile covers entire US
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/seoul-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-sea-93522672

SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile that landed near Japanese waters Friday in its second major weapons test this month that showed a potential ability to launch nuclear strikes on all of the U.S. mainland.

The United States quickly condemned the launch and vowed to take “all necessary measures” to guarantee the safety of its mainland and allies South Korea and Japan. Vice President Kamala Harris will separately meet with leaders of allies who are attending a regional forum in Bangkok to discuss North Korea’s recent ballistic missile launch.

“We strongly condemn these actions and we again call for North Korea to stop further unlawful, destabilizing acts. On behalf of the United States, I reaffirm our ironclad commitment to our Indo-Pacific alliances,” Harris said at the start of the meeting. “Together the countries represented here will continue to urge North Korea to commit to serious and sustained diplomacy.”

The North’s ongoing torrid run of weapons tests aims to advance its nuclear arsenal and win greater concessions in eventual diplomacy, and the launches come as China and Russia have opposed U.S. moves to toughen sanctions aimed at curbing North Korea’s nuclear program.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected the ICBM launch from North Korea’s capital region around 10:15 a.m. and the weapon flew toward the North’s eastern coast across the country. Japan said the ICBM appeared to have flown on a high trajectory and landed west of Hokkaido.

According to South Korean and Japanese estimates, the North Korean missile flew about 6,000-6,100 kilometers (3,600-3,790 miles) at a maximum altitude of 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada told reporters the altitude suggests the missile was launched on a high angle. He said depending on the weight of a warhead to be placed on the missile, the weapon has a range exceeding 15,000 kilometers (9,320 miles), “in which case it could cover the entire mainland United States.”

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the launch “needlessly raises tensions and risks destabilizing” regional security while showing the North’s prioritizing of unlawful weapons programs over the well-being of its people. She said President Joe Biden was briefed over the launch.

“Pyongyang must immediately cease its destabilizing actions and instead choose diplomatic engagement,” Watson said.

Hamada, the Japanese defense minister, called the launch “a reckless act that threatens Japan as well as the region and the international community.”

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launch “a grave provocation and serious threat” to undermine international and regional peace and security. It said South Korea maintains readiness to make “an overwhelming response to any North Korean provocation” amid close coordination with the United States.

After being briefed over the launch, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol ordered officials to boost security cooperation with the United States and Japan and implement unspecified deterrence steps that were previously agreed upon with the United States. Yoon also ordered officials to push for strong international condemnations and sanctions on North Korea, according to his office.

North Korea also launched an ICBM on Nov. 3, but experts said that weapon failed to fly its intended flight and fell into the ocean after a stage separation. That test was believed to have involved a developmental ICBM called Hwasong-17. North Korea has two other types of ICBM — Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 — and their test-launches in 2017 proved they could potentially reach parts of the U.S. homeland.

The Hwasong-17 has a longer potential range than the others, and its huge size suggests it's designed to carry multiple nuclear warheads to defeat missile defense systems. Some experts say the Nov. 3 test showed some technological progress in the development of the Hwasong-17, given that in its earlier test in March, the missile exploded soon after liftoff.

It wasn't immediately known if North Korea launched a Hwasong-17 missile again on Friday or something else.

In recent months, North Korea has performed dozens of shorter-range missile tests that it called simulations of nuclear attacks on South Korean and U.S. targets. But it had halted weapons launches for about a week before it fired a short-range ballistic missile on Thursday.

Before Thursday's launch, the North's foreign minister, Choe Son Hui, threatened to launch "fiercer" military responses to the U.S. bolstering its security commitment to its allies South Korea and Japan.

Choe was referring to Biden's recent trilateral summit with Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on the sidelines of a regional gathering in Cambodia. In their joint statement, the three leaders strongly condemned North Korea's recent missile tests and agreed to work together to strengthen deterrence. Biden reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to defend South Korea and Japan with a full range of capabilities, including its nuclear arms.

Choe didn't say what steps North Korea could take but said that "the U.S. will be well aware that it is gambling, for which it will certainly regret."

Pyongyang sees the U.S. military presence in the region as proof of its hostility toward North Korea. It has said its recent series of weapons launches were its response to what it called provocative military drills between the United States and South Korea.

There have been concerns that North Korea might conduct its first nuclear test in five years as its next major step toward bolstering its military capability against the United States and its allies.

North Korea has been under multiple rounds of United Nations sanctions over its previous nuclear and missile tests. But no fresh sanctions have been applied this year though it has conducted dozens of ballistic missile launches, which are banned by U.N. Security Council resolutions.

That's possible because China and Russia, two of the U.N. council's veto-wielding members, oppose new U.N. sanctions. Washington is locked in a strategic competition with Beijing and in a confrontation with Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	11/17 US probe: US, Western parts in Iran drones
SOURCE	https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/11/17/western-components-iranian-drones/
GIST	<p>The US government has ordered a probe after Western, Japanese, and Israeli components were found in downed Iranian drones in Ukraine, <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> reported.</p> <p>Citing intelligence documents, the outlet estimated that three-quarters of the components were found to be American-made, despite Tehran being subjected to harsh sanctions.</p> <p>The aim of the sanctions is largely to prevent the country from developing nuclear weapons but includes other arms development such as drones.</p> <p>Japanese Components Found</p> <p>Ukrainian investigators also found Japanese components in Iranian Mohajer-6 drones captured intact after being hacked mid-flight.</p>

Nearly a third of the drone's components were of Japanese origin, while roughly half were manufactured by US firms. The findings were revealed and verified by Kyiv-based nonprofit the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (NAKO), which also inspected the drone.

The servomotors in the Mohajer-6 drone, essential to maneuver the aircraft, were made by Japanese firm Tonegawa-Seiko Co., according to the intelligence documents and NAKO report.

Third-Party Distributors

Similarly, several electronic components of the drone were manufactured by German-owned Infineon Technologies AG and Arizona-based Microchip Technology Inc., two of the most prominent global chip manufacturers.

A spokesman for Microchip, **Brian Thorsen**, told *The Wall Street Journal*, "without access to the device itself, we are unable to advise whether it is a Microchip product or counterfeit product and if it is a Microchip product, how it ended up in this particular application."

He said that the company supplies its products to more than 120,000 customers in the industrial, aerospace, defense, and other sectors, adding that third-party distributors also sell its products worldwide.

Israeli Infrared Lens in Iranian Drone?

The outlet also claimed that the Mohajer's high-resolution telescopic infrared lens looks identical to a model made by Ophir Optronics Solutions Ltd., a Jerusalem-based firm, citing the device image and company brochures.

The company's parent organization, MKS Instruments Inc., said they don't supply to Iran.

The Israeli government responded to the report following a review, saying that "the relevant international export control regimes indicate that the lens is neither a controlled defense item nor a dual-use item, according to Israeli law based on international arrangements."

Probe Ordered

The US officials responsible for export-control enforcement declined to verify the findings, the outlet said. However, the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security has launched an investigation into the matter.

Iran's mission to the United Nations also avoided a direct response, saying that Tehran "is ready to meet with Ukraine at the level of technical experts and investigate drone- or parts-ownership claims."

Export-Control Loopholes

Citing a report of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, *The Wall Street Journal* wrote that Chinese companies might be supplying Iran with counterfeit Western components essential to produce combat drones.

Industry and Western security officials said that many of the parts are not covered under export control and could have been bought on the internet and shipped to Iran through other countries, a violation of the law but difficult to prevent.

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HEADLINE	11/17 India border military post to counter China
SOURCE	https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/11/17/india-military-facility-border-counter-china/
GIST	<p>The Indian Army has built a military facility along its border with China to host 450 tanks and over 22,000 troops.</p> <p>The establishment is a reaction to Beijing's expansion along the Pangong Tso lake, located in both India and China.</p>

	<p>The facility was reportedly tested against a wide range of weapons, from small arms to the main gun of T90 tanks.</p> <p>“Habitat and technical storage to include assets for 22,000 troops and approximately 450 vehicles/guns has been constructed in the last two years,” defense sources said, as quoted by <i>The Economic Times</i>.</p> <p>“Focus has now shifted to undertake the construction of permanent defenses and infrastructure to improve defense preparedness.”</p> <p>Apart from the new infrastructure, the army has also built landing crafts in Eastern Ladakh to bolster its patrolling capabilities.</p> <p>Preparing for China</p> <p>India has increased investments in recent years to improve its defense capabilities due to heightened border tensions with China.</p> <p>Last year, the service began the construction of nuclear-hardened tunnels and storage facilities near the heavily-militarized border.</p> <p>Additionally, New Delhi unveiled its first batch of domestically-made attack helicopters designed for high-altitude missions.</p> <p>It will be deployed in areas like the Himalayas, where Indian troops clashed with China in 2020.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Russia plans ‘Iron Man’ suit for soldiers
SOURCE	https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/11/17/russia-soldiers-iron-man-suit/
GIST	<p>Russia plans to equip its troops with a full-body “iron man” suit made of composite armor in a project called “Legionnaire” for the country’s next generation of soldiers.</p> <p>According to a local defense manufacturer, the suit will look like medieval armor and completely cover a warfighter’s body.</p> <p>The company stated that creating an armored suit to increase soldier survivability and protection is a priority for all leading military powers.</p> <p>“Today it will cover the entire body of a warrior and at the same time answer the question of whether it is possible to create ‘armor’ from modern materials that will provide effective protection against small arms,” Armocom deputy general director Oleg Faustov told <i>RIA Novosti</i>.</p> <p>He stressed the need for a strong exoskeleton and an external skeleton to support the suit and protect the person inside.</p> <p>Risks for Future Soldiers</p> <p>The plan to develop an “iron man” suit for Russian soldiers comes amid the increasing belief that humans will not fight in wars at all in the future.</p> <p>Instead, robots and drones will perform combat missions previously carried out by human soldiers. But according to Faustov, these technological advancements will not completely eliminate the need for a real person to conduct military operations.</p> <p>A person will reportedly still have to occupy certain positions on the battlefield, resulting in greater risks.</p>

	<p>“Machines cannot occupy certain lines and territories on their own, in any case a person enters,” Faustov told state-owned <i>Sputnik</i>. “To do this, of course, [soldiers] must be protected as much as possible. [This applied to all] leading armies [in] the world and we are no exception.”</p> <p>Sources privy to the development have revealed that the research phase for the project has been reduced from three years to one year, with an estimated completion by the end of 2023.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Kazakhstan claims foiled coup attempt
SOURCE	https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/11/17/kazakhstan-says-foiled-coup-attempt-ahead-of-early-vote-a79411
GIST	<p>Kazakhstan said Thursday it had prevented a coup attempt by supporters of an exiled opposition figure as it arrested seven people ahead of a presidential election this weekend.</p> <p>On Sunday, Kazakhstan will hold a snap presidential vote expected to cement incumbent Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's grip on power, months after deadly unrest shook the Central Asian country and left more than 230 people dead.</p> <p>The National Security Committee said a group of seven people planned to "organize riots and a coup and proclaim a provisional government," adding that the suspects "share the views of exiled opponent Mukhtar Ablyazov."</p> <p>Ablyazov, a former energy minister and bank chairman, is a hugely controversial figure whom Kazakhstan has tried and sentenced in absentia for murder and embezzlement.</p> <p>The France-based Ablyazov has vociferously encouraged protests through his social media channels.</p> <p>The security service said the group was trying to organize large-scale riots and planning to attack administrative buildings and law enforcement offices with arms and projectiles.</p> <p>Weapons including Kalashnikov assault rifles, sawn-off shotguns, ammunition and materials for Molotov cocktails as well as walkie-talkies were confiscated, it said.</p> <p>Tokayev, 69, became leader in 2019 and has stymied opposition and consolidated power by sidelining his authoritarian predecessor Nursultan Nazarbayev after the January unrest.</p> <p>He has touted himself as a reforming leader capable of uniting the country.</p> <p>Earlier this year, he had empowered law enforcement personnel with "shoot to kill" orders.</p> <p>The vast, ex-Soviet country is precariously perched geopolitically, with historic economic and military ties with Moscow coming under strain over Ukraine and Beijing emerging as a regional power broker.</p> <p>Tokayev has vowed to build "a new Kazakhstan" by liberalizing the judicial system, tackling corruption and undertaking reforms.</p> <p>But deep social inequality that was at the origin of the January protests remains a problem and a potential political threat.</p> <p>Tokayev is facing five little-known challengers as he seeks a seven-year term in the early vote he initiated in September, saying he needed a "new mandate of trust from the people."</p> <p>Elections were initially set for December 2024, but in March, he introduced constitutional reforms to curb the powers of the president and boost the role of parliament, sparking the early ballot.</p>

'No real choice'

Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have criticized Kazakhstan's failure to meet electoral recommendations, including "conditions of eligibility and registration of candidates."

"There is no credible candidate. There is no real choice. I'll be voting against all of them," said Asset Terirgaliyev, a retired resident of the country's economic capital, Almaty, the city which was an epicenter of the riots and subsequent repression.

"These elections are a farce," architect Aidar Ergaly told AFP.

"Had Tokayev said: 'I'm annulling the vote. I'm staying in power for seven years — or however long I want — and then I'll go,' I would respect him for his honesty."

Political analyst Andrei Chebotarev said the January violence, which he said put the country "on the brink of a civil war," had also brought about a "change of the foundations of society and the state."

Balancing act

"A little time has passed and we don't see any real changes yet," said pensioner Svetlana Kadysheva.

Janiya Nakizbekova, a 57-year-old entrepreneur, was more optimistic.

"We have great hope in Tokayev and believe that he cares more about the people than Nazarbayev did."

The International Monetary Fund has warned of the persistent risk of instability as Kazakhstan's economy — heavily dependent on Russia — is suffering from the impact of the war in Ukraine.

A former diplomat, Tokayev has won a reputation as a shrewd politician and is expected to continue performing a balancing act between the West, Russia and China.

He has also criticized Moscow's invasion of Ukraine but stopped short of joining Western sanctions on Russia.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	11/18 Ransomware stifles UK crisis management
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-incidents-now-make-up-majority-of-british-governments-crisis-management-cobra-meetings/
GIST	<p>Ransomware incidents in the United Kingdom are now so impactful that the majority of the British government's recent crisis management COBRA meetings have been convened in response to them rather than other emergencies.</p> <p>The need to regularly hold cross-departmental COBRA meetings reveals how little progress Westminster has made to address the risks ransomware poses to the country, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the government's response, speaking to The Record on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to openly discuss the matter.</p> <p>They noted that despite the repeated warnings of the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC) chief executive Lindy Cameron describing ransomware as the most acute threat facing the country, there did not appear to be a proportionate level of ministerial interest. Successive Home Secretaries have instead prioritized the issue of small boat crossings of migrants in the English Channel.</p>

The gatherings — officially known as a meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee, which takes place in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) — have historically been convened in response to terror attacks, but are now increasingly focused on cybersecurity incidents affecting critical services.

According to the NCSC's annual review, the U.K. was impacted by 18 ransomware incidents this year which "required a nationally coordinated response" including attacks affecting the [South Staffordshire Water](#) utilities company and the National Health Service software supplier [Advanced](#). The increased focus on these incidents at COBRA meetings has not previously been reported.

Ransomware 'sprints'

The surge in COBRA meetings follows a cross-Whitehall "sprint" — a project management term — on ransomware which concluded last December. Its intention was to come up with recommendations to deal with the issue that would be signed off on in advance of the G7 meeting of interior ministers at the end of 2021. However a year on from the conclusion of that "sprint" the government has still delivered no actionable decisions.

The sprint featured several different strands — approaches to different aspects of the ransomware ecosystem — that explored potential mechanisms to disrupt ransomware attacks, each led by different departments across Whitehall. These included a strand on ransomware payments, one on mandatory reporting, one on insurance, one on dealing with cryptocurrency exchanges, and another on international engagement.

Although the existence of the sprint was confirmed in the NCSC's annual review, the topics it focused on and its outcomes are not public. The annual review stated: "A government ransomware 'sprint', led by the Home Office, improved understanding of the scale and complexity of the threat, and helped it to better prioritize, focus resources, refine advice and be more targeted in its engagement."

But the initial intentions for the sprint were more ambitious, according to multiple sources involved in the process. They said the NCSC's description that it "improved understanding of the scale and complexity of the threat" said more about the government's starting position than where it finished.

The sprint established several things which the government would not do; it would not prohibit ransom payments, nor would it introduce a "mandatory reporting" obligation on companies to disclose incidents to the authorities; but "there hasn't been any tangible, deliverable outcomes at this stage," one source acknowledged to The Record.

Introducing mandatory reporting was desired because authorities lack visibility on the true scale of the ransomware problem beyond critical incidents requiring a national response. "Organizations often do not report the compromises," warned NCSC in its annual review. This known unknown — of how prevalent ransomware attacks actually are — has led to friction between government departments.

Although cyber policy officials at the Home Office do not feel that they lack support from other colleagues in Whitehall, The Record understands that the Home Office has launched its own ransomware research project to try and find out the true number of incidents in the U.K. due to frustrations with data provided by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

DCMS compiles an [annual cyber breaches survey](#), the most recent edition of which found there had been a fall in ransomware attacks from 17% of all incidents in 2020 to just 4% in 2021. However officials who spoke to The Record questioned the utility of the self-reported survey, which has a bias against those who do not want to disclose any incidents, and is produced from data collected a year prior, a time during which the ransomware ecosystem has changed substantially.

"We shouldn't be basing policy on an incomplete evidence base," said one source with knowledge of the policy process.

At the launch event for its [2022 annual review](#), The Record asked NCSC's management board whether central government was doing enough given that both the agency's chief executive and the head of the intelligence agency GCHQ, Sir Jeremy Fleming, had in speeches that morning described it as such an acute threat to the country.

Paul Maddinson, NCSC's director of national resilience and strategy, responded that government policy change wasn't the only response available, and that businesses being prepared to deal with a ransomware attack could also effectively undermine the business model: "A lot of it is to get organizations to understand that they have agency. You can stop ransomware attacks, or you can stop them being as disruptive as they might be, and I think that's a really important message."

Dr. Ian Levy, the agency's [outgoing technical director](#), added: "More than any other type of cybercrime, ransomware is driven by money. Obviously. And if you look at the economic model behind it and can work out where to intervene — where there's an asymmetric benefit for us — it can have a big effect on their ability to monetise with relatively small amounts of effort."

"I apologize in advance, but you're not trying to beat them, you're trying to send them to France. The whole point is to make the U.K. more risky, less profitable, less useful, less scalable for ransomware while we fix the underlying problems."

'No light at the end of the tunnel'

In response to a list of questions regarding all of the statements in this report, a government spokesperson told The Record: "Defending the U.K. from ransomware attacks is a core priority for this government. Given the complex nature of the threat, we are working collaboratively across departments, with law enforcement and agencies, and our international partners to strengthen our cyber capabilities and build the U.K.'s resilience."

They added that there are ongoing reviews of the government's policy and operational approach to tackling ransomware, including through consistent collaboration with industry and international partners.

Officials dealing directly with the ransomware issue told The Record they saw no light at the end of the tunnel, even of the prospect of any improvements which could help the U.K. clamp down on the problem.

They said they were seeing "an increasingly successful business model" with "ransom demands increasing" and "payments increasing" and it becoming "harder to avoid paying a ransom because the entire ecosystem is pushing that way."

Discussions have continued in government since the conclusion of last year's sprint, with sanctions for foreign cryptocurrency exchanges described as the most fruitful.

The Home Office has also introduced provisions in its [Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill](#) that are intended to allow law enforcement to seize cryptocurrency assets "associated with illicit activity such as money laundering, fraud and ransomware attacks." While the law is intended to empower law enforcement to force cryptocurrency exchanges to hand over data relating to potential criminal enterprises, it is not clear how it would be used internationally. The Supreme Court earlier this year [ruled law enforcement cannot compel information](#) from businesses based outside of the United Kingdom.

The international aspects of the ransomware ecosystem contribute to it posing "one of the toughest policy challenges of our times," according to one official. In its annual review, the NCSC stated: "Most of the ransomware criminal groups that target the UK continue to be based in and around Russia. While it is not clear the degree to which these ransomware groups are directed by the Kremlin, those operating from within Russia's borders benefit from the tacit consent of the Russian State."

The Record understands that the National Cyber Force has been working closely with American partners in several offensive operations intended to address cybercriminal groups, although the British security and intelligence community is generally less public about its activities.

These activities have had a significant impact on the ransomware ecosystem according to British officials, who said that up until the severe impact of ransomware attacks on the [Colonial Pipeline](#) and [meat-packer JBS](#) last year it had been they who had been pushing for their American colleagues to do more on the issue.

In the wake of those attacks, which drove political interest in America to tackle ransomware actors, the groups themselves deliberately scaled down their targeting, said multiple officials. “They are sailing a little bit below the radar so they’re less likely to hit the front pages, and if you are less likely to hit the front pages then there’s less political will generated,” one added.

In its annual review, the NCSC concurred: “It is apparent that the public outcry and heightened political interest has raised the stakes for cyber criminals. In response it became clear that some groups modified their techniques to avoid law enforcement, sanctions and other operational responses.”

Since the law enforcement actions of 2021 “the whole ecosystem has diversified enormously” with a more street-gang oriented underworld contributing to the threat. During the COVID-19 pandemic some groups had said they wouldn’t target hospitals — whether honestly or not, they attempted to suggest there were policies they would enforce regarding targeting — but now “random criminals, affiliates, are just launching attacks indiscriminately,” said one official, while the large groups are taking a conscious effort to avoid attention.

The challenge of addressing ransomware is not unique to the United Kingdom, which [joined with a coalition of nearly 40 other countries](#) earlier this month at the international Counter Ransomware Initiative to discuss how they can collectively tackle the global national security threat.

The initiative pledged to focus on combating the ecosystem’s ability to profit by “implementing and enforcing anti-money laundering” measures for “virtual assets and virtual asset service providers,” as well as disrupting the ransomware actors “to the fullest extent permitted under each partner’s applicable laws” however it did not publicly advance any specific solutions regarding the apparent safe haven that these groups and their infrastructure have in Russia.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Country plans to upload itself to metaverse
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/one-of-the-smallest-countries-in-the-world-plans-to-upload-itself-to-the-metaverse-in-the-face-of-climate-change/
GIST	<p>An island country called Tuvalu, situated about halfway between Hawaii and Australia, has announced that it would upload itself to the metaverse in response to the dangers it faces due to climate change.</p> <p>At the COP27 climate summit, Tuvalu's foreign minister, Simon Kofe, said his country has to think of alternative ways to preserve itself in the face of rising sea levels. Scientists say that if climate change goes unchecked, Tuvalu could be uninhabitable by the end of the century.</p> <p>"Our land, our ocean, our culture are the most precious assets of our people, and to keep them safe from harm, no matter what happens in the physical world, we will move them to the cloud," he said in a video from a digitized version of an island.</p> <p>Kofe says the metaverse could preserve Tuvalu's physical landmarks, like churches and monuments. The metaverse would also host the country's culture, such as language and customs, so that Tuvaluans can engage in cultural practices from anywhere in the world.</p> <p>He also says moving to the metaverse would solidify Tuvalu's sovereignty; if there's no physical land to govern, they could preside over virtual land.</p>

	<p>Kofe says resorting to the metaverse is the "worst-case scenario," but inaction on a global scale forced Tuvalu to consider making the metaverse its new home.</p> <p>The perils of partial underwater submersion are particularly true for Pacific island countries, which already face dangerous flooding, tsunamis, and cyclones.</p> <p>The country's highest peak is only 15 feet above sea level, and rising tides are projected to encroach another eight to 10 inches within the next 100 years. Rising sea levels mean sunken infrastructure and the destruction of farmlands by saltwater intrusion.</p> <p>But this situation begs another question: is the metaverse capable of hosting an entire country? There could be issues with computing power and the affordability of VR headsets, as about 12,000 people currently live in Tuvalu.</p> <p>It also brings up that the metaverse isn't necessarily an environmentally friendly alternative, as it relies on lots of technology that contributes to e-waste and carbon emissions.</p> <p>But Kofe and the citizens of Tuvalu don't want to move to the metaverse; they're saying it's an alternative to the perils their country will face if climate change continues to go uncontrolled.</p> <p>Will other island nations begin to plan their move to the metaverse? Or will broadcasting these plans serve as a wake-up call to address the stressors climate change will bring to our environmental and technological structures?</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Microsoft: token theft attacks on rise
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/microsoft-hackers-are-using-this-concerning-tactic-to-dodge-multi-factor-authentication/
GIST	<p>Microsoft has outlined several mitigations to protect against attacks on multi-factor authentication that will unfortunately make life more difficult for your remote workers.</p> <p>Three years ago, attacks on multi-factor authentication (MFA) were so rare that Microsoft didn't have decent statistics on them, largely because few organisations had enabled MFA.</p> <p>But with MFA use rising as attacks on passwords become more common, Microsoft has seen an increase in attackers using token theft in their attempts to sidestep MFA.</p> <p>In these attacks, the attacker compromises a token issued to someone who's already completed MFA and replays that token to gain access from a different device. Tokens are central to OAuth 2.0 identity platforms, including Azure Active Directory (AD), which aim to make authentication simpler and faster for users, but in a way that's still resilient to password attacks.</p> <p>Moreover, Microsoft warns that token theft is dangerous because it doesn't require high technical skills, detection is difficult and, because the technique has only recently seen an uptick, few organisations have mitigations in place.</p> <p>"Recently, the Microsoft Detection and Response Team (DART) has seen an increase in attackers utilizing token theft for this purpose," Microsoft says in a blogpost.</p> <p>"By compromising and replaying a token issued to an identity that has already completed multifactor authentication, the threat actor satisfies the validation of MFA and access is granted to organizational resources accordingly. This poses to be a concerning tactic for defenders because the expertise needed to compromise a token is very low, is hard to detect, and few organizations have token theft mitigations in their incident response plan."</p>

	<p>When accessing web applications shielded by Azure AD, the user needs to present a valid token, which they can get after signing into Azure AD using their credentials. Admins can set policy to require MFA to sign into an account from a browser. The token issued to the user is presented to the web application, which validates the token and opens up access.</p> <p>"When the user is phished, the malicious infrastructure captures both the credentials of the user, and the token," Microsoft explains.</p> <p>If both credentials and the token are stolen, the attacker can use these for numerous attacks. Microsoft highlights business email compromise, which is the largest cause of cybercrime financial losses today.</p> <p>Microsoft also warns of "Pass-the-cookie" attacks, where an attacker compromises a device and extracts browser cookies that are created after authentication to Azure AD from a browser. The attacker passes the cookie to another browser on another system to bypass security checks.</p> <p>"Users who are accessing corporate resources on personal devices are especially at risk. Personal devices often have weaker security controls than corporate-managed devices and IT staff lack visibility to those devices to determine compromise," Microsoft notes. This is a greater risk for remote workers who use personal devices.</p> <p>To counter the threat of token theft attacks on MFA, Microsoft recommends shortening session and token lifetimes, though this has a convenience cost to the user. Mitigations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the lifetime of the session increases the number of times a user is forced to re-authenticate • Reducing the viable time of a token forces threat actors to increase the frequency of token theft attempts • Microsoft recommends implementing Conditional Access App Control in Microsoft Defender for Cloud Apps for users connecting from unmanaged devices <p>Microsoft also recommends implementing FIDO2 security keys, Windows Hello for Business, or certificate-based authentication for users.</p> <p>Users with high-level privileges, such as the Global Domain admin, should have a segregated cloud-only identity. This will help reduce the attack surface from on-premises to cloud if an attacker compromises on-premises systems. These identities should not have a mailbox attached to them, Microsoft said.</p> <p>"We recognize that while it may be recommended for organizations to enforce location, device compliance, and session lifetime controls to all applications it may not always be practical," Microsoft notes.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Retail season PayPal money request scams
SOURCE	https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2022/11/17/black-friday-and-retail-season-watch-out-for-paypal-money-request-scams/
GIST	<p>Given that we're getting into peak retail season, you'll find cybersecurity warnings with a "Black Friday" theme all over the internet...</p> <p>...including, of course, right here on Naked Security!</p> <p>As regular readers will know, however, we're not terribly keen on online tips that are specific to Black Friday, because cybersecurity matters 365-and-a-quarter days a year.</p> <p>Don't take cybersecurity seriously only when it's Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, Christmas or any other gift-giving holiday, or only for the New Year Sales, the Spring Sales, the Summer sales or any other seasonal discount opportunity.</p>

As we said when retail season kicked off earlier this month in many parts of the world:

The best reason for improving your cybersecurity in the leadup to Black Friday is that it means you will be improving your cybersecurity for the rest of the year, and will encourage you to keep on improving through 2023 and beyond.

Having said that, this article is about a PayPal-branded scam that was reported to us earlier this week by a regular reader who thought it would be worth warning others about, especially for those with PayPal accounts who may be more inclined to use them at this time of year than any other.

The good thing about this scam is that you should spot it for what it is: made-up nonsense.

The bad thing about this scam is that it's astonishingly easy for criminals to set up, and it carefully avoids sending spoofed emails or tricking you to visit bogus websites, because the crooks use a PayPal service to generate their initial contact via official PayPal servers.

Here goes.

Spoofing explained

A *spoofed email* is one that insists it's from a well-known company or domain, typically by putting a believable email address in the From: line, and by including logos, taglines or other contact details copied from the brand it's trying to impersonate.

Remember that the name and email address shown in an email next to the word From are actually just part of the message itself, so the sender can put almost anything they like in there, regardless of where they really sent the message from.

A *spoofed website* is one that copies the look and feel of the real thing, often simply by ripping off the exact web content and images from the original site to make it look as pixel-perfect as possible.

Scam sites may also try to make the domain name that you see in the address bar look at least vaguely realistic, for example by putting the spoofed brand at the left-hand end of the web address, so that you might see something like paypal.com.bogus.example, in the hope that you won't check the right-hand end of the name, which actually determines who owns the site.

Other scammers try to acquire lookalike names, for example by replacing W (one W-for-Whisky character) with VV (two V-for Victor characters), or by using I (writing an upper case I-for-India character) in place of l (a lower case L-for-Lima).

But spoofing tricks of this sort can often be spotted fairly easily, for example by:

Learning how to examine the so-called headers of an email message, which shows which server a message actually came from, rather than the server that the sender claimed they sent it from.

Setting up an email filter that automatically scans for scamminess in both the headers and the body of every email message that anyone tries to send you.

Browsing via a network or endpoint firewall that blocks outbound web requests to fake sites and discards inbound web replies that include risky content.

Using a password manager that ties usernames and passwords to specific websites, and thus can't be fooled by fake content or lookalike names.

Email scammers therefore often go out of their way to ensure that their first contact with potential victims involves messages that really do come from genuine sites or online services, and that link to servers that really are run by those same legitimate sites...

...as long as the scammers can come up with some way of maintaining contact after that initial message, in order to keep the scam going.

[Romance scammers](#), who try to lure victims into fake online relationships in order to sweet-talk them out of money, know this trick only too well. They typically start by making contact in a conventional way on a genuine dating site, using someone else's photos and online identity. There, they charm their victims into leaving the comparative safety of the legitimate site and switching to an unsupervised one-to-one instant messaging service.

The "money request" scam

Here's how the PayPal "money request" scam works:

The scammer creates a PayPal account and uses PayPal's "money request" service to send you an official PayPal email asking you to send them some funds. Friends can use this service as an informal but relatively safe way of splitting expenses after a night out, asking for help paying a bill, or even to get paid for small tasks such as cleaning, gardening, pet sitting, and so on.

The scammer makes the request look like an existing charge for a genuine product or service, though not one you actually ordered, and probably for what looks like an unlikely or unreasonable price.

The scammer adds a contact phone number into the message, apparently offering an easy way to cancel the payment request if you think it's scam.

So the email actually does originate from PayPal, giving it an air of authenticity, et entices you to react by phoning the crooks back, rather than by replying to the email itself.

Like this:

In this example, the product you're supposed to have purchased is the name of a genuine consumer anti-virus program, with the number 365 tacked on the end to give it the look of an online-only cloud-based product.

Given that you are quite well aware that the payment request was never authorised by you, you may well report it to PayPal...

...but it's also tempting to phone the "business" that put through the request to tell them not to hit you up again next week or next month when their "records" show that the "bill" still hasn't been paid.

After all, the phone call's free (in the UK, as in many other countries, the -800- dialling code denotes a toll-free call), and if someone you know really has tried to buy some online cybersecurity software and charge it to your dime, why not try to get to the bottom of it and stop the "payment" getting through?

Of course, it's all a pack of lies: there's no anti-virus program; there was no purchase; and no one actually paid out £550 to anyone for anything.

The crooks have simply found a way to abuse PayPal's free *Money Request* service to generate emails that really do come from PayPal, that include real PayPal links, and that use the message field in the request to give you an official-looking way to contact them directly...

...just like a romance scammer schmoozing you at arm's length on a dating site, and then convincing you to switch over to messaging them directly, where the dating platform can no longer supervise or regulate your interactions.

What to do?

The quickest and easiest thing to do, of course, is nothing!

PayPal money requests are exactly what they say: a way for friends, family, someone, anyone, to invite you to send them money in a reasonably secure way.

	<p>They aren't invoices; they aren't payment demands; they're not receipts; and they are unrelated to any existing purchase you did or didn't make via PayPal or anywhere else.</p> <p>If simply you do nothing, then nothing gets paid out and no one receives anything, so the scam fails.</p> <p>We nevertheless recommend that you report bogus requests of this sort to PayPal, which will help to get the offending account closed down and to ensure that no one else either pays up through fear or calls the given phone number "just in case".</p> <p>Whatever you do, don't send any money, and definitely don't call the criminals back, because their true goal is to establish direct contact so they can start working you over to you to trick you into revealing personal information that could ultimately cost you a lot more than £549.67.</p> <p>Should you tell the authorities?</p> <p>Whether it's during Black Friday season or at any other time of the year, we urge you to consider reporting scams of this sort to the relevant regulator or investigatory body in your country.</p> <p>It might not feel as though you're doing much to help, and you probably don't have the time to report each and every one, but if sufficiently many people do provide some evidence to the authorities, there is a least a chance that they will do something about it.</p> <p>On the other hand, if no one says anything, then nothing will or can be done.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Russian duo indicted for e-book piracy
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/russian-duo-indicted-over-ebook/
GIST	<p>A Russian couple have been indicted for allegedly running one of the world's biggest e-book piracy websites.</p> <p>Anton Napolsky, 33, and Valeriia Ermakova, 27, both of St Petersburg, were arrested on November 3 in Cordoba, Argentina at the request of the US authorities, according to the Department of Justice (DoJ).</p> <p>It's claimed they ran Z-Library – the self-styled “world's largest library,” containing 11 million e-books for download.</p> <p>Online since 2009, the site offered e-books in various file formats stripped of copyright protections, in violation of US law. It also encouraged users to upload their own titles.</p> <p>According to court documents, the Z-Library also operated a complex network of 249 linked web domains, all of which have now been taken offline and seized by the US authorities.</p> <p>“The defendants are alleged to have operated a website for over a decade whose central purpose was providing stolen intellectual property, in violation of copyright laws,” said FBI assistant director-in-charge, Michael Driscoll.</p> <p>“Intellectual property theft crimes deprive their victims of both ingenuity and hard-earned revenue. The FBI is determined to ensure those willing to steal and profit from the creativity of others are stopped and made to face the consequences in the criminal justice system.”</p> <p>The Russian duo have been charged not only with criminal copyright infringement, but also wire fraud and money laundering, which can carry lengthy sentences in the US.</p> <p>“The defendants profited illegally off work they stole, often uploading works within mere hours of publication, and in the process victimized authors, publishers and booksellers,” said US attorney Breon Peace.</p>

	“This office is committed to protecting the intellectual property rights that enable creative and artistic expression, and holding individuals accountable for threatening those rights.”
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HEADLINE	11/17 Netflix phishing emails surge 78%
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/netflix-phishing-emails-surge-78/
GIST	<p>Security researchers are warning that corporate accounts could be at risk after noting a 78% increase in email impersonation attacks spoofing the Netflix brand since October.</p> <p>If employees use the same credentials for personal accounts like Netflix as their work accounts, campaigns like this may imperil corporate systems and data, warned Egress.</p> <p>The group behind this particular campaign is using Unicode characters to bypass natural language processing (NLP) scanning in traditional anti-phishing filters, the security vendor claimed.</p> <p>“Unicode helps to convert international languages within browsers – but it can also be used for visual spoofing by exploiting international language characters to make a fake URL look legitimate,” Egress wrote.</p> <p>“For example, you could register a phishing domain as ‘xn–pple-43d.com,’ which would be translated by a browser to ‘apple.com.’ This is known as a homograph attack.”</p> <p>Unicode is also used in the sender display names, such as “Netflix” and “help desk.” However, the threat actors didn’t stop there.</p> <p>“Other obfuscation techniques include trying to break up the text with non-identifiable characters, white on white text, and using characters from different languages to break the NLP’s perception as much as possible,” the vendor continued.</p> <p>“For example, using two V characters next to one another will be read as two Vs by a machine. But to a person skim-reading, VV looks a lot like W.”</p> <p>Alongside these techniques, the phishers use classic social engineering tactics, such as rushing the user into action and piggy-backing on current events – in this case Netflix’s introduction of a new ad-tier package.</p> <p>Although over half (52%) of the emails spotted by Egress use this lure, other subject lines include “Netflix cancellation confirmation” and “Get Unlimited Membership for \$0.99.”</p> <p>The campaign appears to be targeting users in the US and UK primarily.</p> <p>“The concern for organizations is if an employee has their credentials harvested and uses the same, or very similar, passwords for their work accounts,” Egress concluded.</p> <p>“Both organizations and individuals also need to be aware how attackers weaponize the 24-hour news cycle to generate new, targeted attacks.”</p> <p>The vendor said it further highlights the need for advanced anti-phishing tools.</p> <p>“These attacks are sophisticated and you can’t just rely on training and the human eye,” it added.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 FBI: Hive extorted \$100M from 1,300 victims
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-hive-ransomware-extorted-100m-from-over-1-300-victims/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said today that the notorious Hive ransomware gang has successfully extorted roughly \$100 million from over a thousand companies since June 2021.</p> <p>To add insult to injury, the FBI says that the Hive gang will deploy additional ransomware payloads on the networks of victims who refuse to pay the ransom.</p> <p>"As of November 2022, Hive ransomware actors have victimized over 1,300 companies worldwide, receiving approximately US\$100 million in ransom payments, according to FBI information," the FBI revealed.</p> <p>"Hive actors have been known to reinfect—with either Hive ransomware or another ransomware variant—the networks of victim organizations who have restored their network without making a ransom payment."</p> <p>The list of victims includes organizations from a wide range of industries and critical infrastructure sectors such as government facilities, communications, and information technology, with a focus on Healthcare and Public Health (HPH) entities.</p> <p>This was revealed in a joint advisory published today with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).</p> <p>Today's advisory was issued to share Hive indicators of compromise (IOCs) and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) discovered by the FBI while investigating Hive ransomware attacks.</p> <p>The end goal is to help defenders detect malicious activity associated with Hive affiliates and reduce or eliminate the impact of such incidents.</p> <p>While submissions to the ID Ransomware platform don't include all Hive ransomware attacks, victims have submitted more than 850 samples since the start of the year, many of them pushed following a huge spike of activity between late March and mid-April.</p> <p>Request for incident reports</p> <p>While the three federal agencies behind the advisory do not encourage paying the ransoms as it will most likely encourage other threat actors to join the ransomware onslaught, victims are urged to report Hive attacks to their local FBI field office or to CISA at report@cisa.gov regardless of whether they pay the ransom or not.</p> <p>This will help law enforcement collect critical information needed to keep track of the ransomware operation's activity, prevent additional attacks, or hold the attackers accountable for their actions.</p> <p>The FBI also released additional indicators of compromise and technical details associated with Hive ransomware attacks in August 2021.</p> <p>Hive is a Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) operation active since at least June 2021, with some of its members known to have worked for both Hive and the Conti cybercrime gang simultaneously for at least six months, starting in November 2021.</p> <p>"We have identified extended evidence of HIVE actively using both the initial attack accesses provided by Conti and the services of Conti's pen-testers," Advanced Intel's Head Of Research Yelisey Boguslavskiy told BleepingComputer in May 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 ARCrypter ransomware expands worldwide
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/previously-unidentified-arccrypter-ransomware-expands-worldwide/
GIST	<p>A previously unknown ‘ARCCrypter’ ransomware that compromised key organizations in Latin America is now expanding its attacks worldwide.</p> <p>Threat actors behind the new ransomware family attacked a government agency in Chile last August, targeting both Linux and Windows systems and appending the “.crypt” extension on encrypted files.</p> <p>Back then, Chilean threat analyst Germán Fernández told BleepingComputer that the strain appeared entirely new, not connected to any known ransomware families.</p> <p>Researchers at BlackBerry have confirmed this via a report that identifies the family as ARCCrypter and links it to a second attack against the Colombia National Food and Drug Surveillance Institute (Invima) in October.</p> <p>BlackBerry also warns that ARCCrypter is now expanding its operations outside Latin America and targeting various organizations worldwide, including China and Canada.</p> <p>BleepingComputer confirmed this expansion, also seeing ARCCrypter victims in Germany, USA, and France.</p> <p>The ransom demands vary and get as low as \$5,000 in some cases seen by BleepingComputer, so ARCCrypter operates as a mid-tier ransomware actor.</p> <p>ARCCrypter details</p> <p>BlackBerry says the first samples of ARCCrypter appeared in early August 2022, a few weeks before the Chile attack.</p> <p>The attack vector remains unknown, but the analysts were able to locate two AnonFiles URLs that are used as remote resources for fetching a “win.zip” archive containing “win.exe.”</p> <p>The executable is a dropper file that contains the resources BIN and HTML. HTML holds the ransom note data, while BIN contains encrypted data that requires a password.</p> <p>If a password is provided, BIN will create a random directory on the compromised machine to store the second-stage payload, which is named using random alphanumeric characters.</p> <p>“While we were unable to identify the correct decryption key used for decryption of the BIN resource, we believe with a high degree of certainty that the second payload is the ARCCrypter ransomware,” says BlackBerry in the report.</p> <p>While the threat actors claim to steal data during their attacks, the ransomware operation does not currently have a data leak site that they use to publish data for unpaid victims.</p> <p>At this time, little is known about the operators of ARCCrypter, their origin, language, and potential links to other ransomware gangs.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Phishing kit targets holiday shoppers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/phishing-kit-impersonates-well-known-brands-to-target-us-shoppers/
GIST	A sophisticated phishing kit has been targeting North Americans since mid-September, using lures focused on holidays like Labor Day and Halloween.

The kit uses multiple evasion detection techniques and incorporates several mechanisms to keep non-victims away from its phishing pages.

According to Akamai, whose security researchers discovered the campaign, one of the most interesting features of the kit is a token-based system that ensures each victim is redirected to a unique phishing page URL.

Campaign overview

The campaign spotted by Akamai started in September 2022 and continued throughout October, preying on online shoppers looking for "holiday specials."

The central theme of the phishing emails sent to prospective victims is a chance to win a prize from a reputable brand.

The links in the email don't raise any alarms as they lead to the phishing site after a series of redirections, while URL shorteners conceal most URLs.

Additionally, the attackers abuse legitimate cloud services like Google, AWS, and Azure, abusing their good reputation to bypass protection mechanisms.

Everyone visiting the phishing site wins the promised prize after completing a short survey. In addition, a five-minute timer ensures those taking the survey are infused with a feeling of urgency.

Some impersonated brands include sporting goods firm Dick's, high-end luggage maker Tumi, Delta Airlines, and the wholesale clubs, Sam's Club and Costco.

To increase the campaign's effectiveness, the phishing actors include fake user testimonials showcasing the received prizes.

After "winning" the prize, the victim is requested to cover the shipping costs for receiving the prize, for which they need to enter their payment card details.

Of course, there is no prize to be shipped, and the credit card details are stolen by the threat actors to be used for online purchases.

Akamai says roughly 89% of users landing on phishing domains are from the United States and Canada. Depending on their exact location, the redirection takes them to a different phishing site impersonating locally available brands.

Each victim gets a unique URL

Each phishing email contains a link to a landing page with an anchor (#) usually used to direct a visitor to a specific part of the linked-to page.

In this phishing campaign, the anchor tag represents a token used by JavaScript on the phishing landing to reconstruct a URL to which the target will be redirected.

"The values being after the HTML anchor will not be considered as HTTP parameters and will not be sent to the server, yet this value will be accessible by JavaScript code running on the victim's browser," [explains Akamai](#).

"In the context of a phishing scam, the value placed after the HTML anchor might be ignored or overlooked when scanned by security products that are verifying whether it is malicious or not."

"This value will also be missed if viewed by a traffic inspection tool."

	<p>Security products and network traffic inspection tools overlook this token, so it doesn't introduce risks for the phishing actors.</p> <p>Instead, it helps keep unwanted traffic, researchers, analysts, and random visitors away from the phishing landing pages.</p> <p>Those without a valid token, and browser redirections that don't use JavaScript for their rendering, will fail to access the phishing site.</p> <p>Apart from filtering non-victims, the tokens can also be used for victim-specific tracking, campaign performance measurement, and more.</p> <p>In summary, the kit combines almost all known techniques for effectiveness and detection avoidance, making it a potent threat to North Americans.</p> <p>With the Black Friday and Christmas shopping season approaching, consumers should be extra vigilant when they receive messages about promotions and special offers.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Cyberattack costs skyrocket: \$1M/incident
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/zero-trust-initiatives-stall-cyberattack-costs-1m-per-incident
GIST	<p>Organizations are struggling with mounting data losses, increased downtime, and rising recovery costs due to cyberattacks — to the tune of \$1.06 million in costs per incident. Meanwhile, IT security staffs are stalled on getting defenses up to speed.</p> <p>That's according to the 2022 Dell Global Data Protection Index (GDPI) survey of 1,000 IT decision-makers across 15 countries and 14 industries, which found that organizations that experienced disruption have also suffered an average of 2TB data loss and 19 hours of downtime.</p> <p>Most respondents (67%) said they lack confidence that their existing data protection measures are sufficient to cope with malware and ransomware threats. A full 63% said they are not very confident that all business-critical data can be reliably recovered in the event of a destructive cyberattack.</p> <p>Their fears seem founded: Nearly half of respondents (48%) experienced a cyberattack in the past 12 months that prevented access to their data (a 23% increase from 2021) — and that's a trend that Colm Keegan, senior consultant for data protection solutions at Dell Technologies, says will likely continue.</p> <p>"The growth and increased distribution of data across edge, core data center and multiple public cloud environments are making it exceedingly difficult for IT admins to protect their data," Keegan explains.</p> <p>On the protection front, most organizations are falling behind; for instance, 91% are aware of or planning to deploy a zero-trust architecture, but only 12% are fully deployed.</p> <p>And it's not just advanced defense that's lacking: Keegan points out that 69% of respondents stated they simply cannot meet their backup windows to be prepared for a ransomware attack.</p> <p>Data Protection Strategies Face Headwinds</p> <p>One of the primary reasons data protection strategies are failing is the lack of visibility of where that data resides and what it is — a problem exacerbated by the rapid, ongoing adoption of cloud-native apps and containers. More than three-quarters of survey respondents said there is a lack of common data protection solutions for these newer technologies.</p> <p>"Seventy-two percent said they are unable to keep up with what their developers are doing in the cloud — it's basically a blind spot for them," Keegan says.</p>

Claude Mandy, chief evangelist of data security at Symmetry Systems, a provider of hybrid cloud data security solutions, agrees that a lack of visibility is the primary reason current data-protection strategies fail.

"Organizations simply do not know what data they have, where it is, let alone how it is protected," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of the data-protection failures are preventable by simply knowing the answers to these questions."

He adds that the problem is worsened by the constant change of data within an organization. From his perspective, the sheer scale and complexity of millions of individual data objects across thousands of data stored in multiple clouds, multiplied by a seemingly infinite combination of roles and permissions for thousands of user and machine identities, would be challenging for chief information security officers (CISOs) to secure even if they were static. They're not, so the situation is even more challenging.

To boot, in a lot of cases, organizations are using multiple data security tools for different silos of information, with no overarching integration between them.

"The billions of objects form over months or years, and change constantly," Mandy says. "This is further exacerbated through continuous data flows, privilege creep, data sprawl, and organizational churn, resulting in [visibility] to data that is far from ideal."

Zero-Trust Implementation Lags, Despite Interest

Zero trust is [growing in popularity](#) in enterprise security because not trusting users by default works well to reduce risk. Indeed, virtually all the GDPI respondents indicated they intend to implement zero trust into their environments at some point.

However, actual deployment is not happening at a rapid pace — as mentioned, only 12% of respondents indicated they have fully deployed at zero-trust architecture into their environments. According to researchers, the main problem is a critical shortfall in IT skills, particularly as it relates to cyber recovery and data protection.

Widely reported shortages of trained cybersecurity professionals are driving the industry to try to come up with some with creative recruiting and training solutions, but just 65 cybersecurity professionals are in the workforce for every 100 available jobs, [a recent study shows](#).

"If you don't have cybersecurity professionals on staff, it's virtually impossible to make progress on deploying a zero-trust framework, unless, of course, you rely on partners to help you get there," Keegan says. "Now consider the demand for these resources in the market. Like supply chain constraints, demand is high, and the supply is low."

Patrick Tiquet, vice president of security and architecture at Keeper Security, a provider of zero-trust and zero-knowledge cybersecurity software, says that zero-trust management can be challenging even with staff on board.

"Implementation of [zero trust] is currently a common data-protection strategy," he explains. "However, for [zero trust] to be effective, access and roles must first be configured correctly."

This means ensuring the right people have access to the right data and resources within the zero-trust architecture. Roles must be implemented that are adequately scoped to protect the data that role can access — and correctly configuring access to data just one time ("set it and forget it," in other words) is not enough.

"The organization must maintain and manage data access through the lifecycle of the data, and as the organization grows," Tiquet adds. "Organizations must make sure that, as teams grow and change, the access given to a specific role is still appropriate."

Vendor Consolidation on the To-Do List

Keegan says it's likely there will be some retooling at organizations in terms of platforms — many survey respondents (85%) said they believe they would see a benefit through reducing the number of data protection vendors they work with.

"The research tends to support this sentiment," he adds. "For example, those using a single data protection vendor had far fewer incidents of data loss than those using multiple vendors."

Likewise, the cost of data loss incidents resulting from a cyber attack was approximately 34% higher for those organizations working with multiple data protection vendors than those using a single vendor, according to the survey.

John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at Netenrich, a security and operations analytics software-as-a-service (SaaS) company, says the [current spate of M&A and consolidation](#) in the cybersecurity market speaks to those drivers — but warns that vendors trying to be all things to all security problems has its own downsides.

"The larger tech firms get, the less ability they have to innovate and solve problems leading to opportunities for new vendors to step in with new solutions," he explains. "It's [a cycle] we see of M&A frenzy and stagnation, then new companies enter to innovate — and more M&A."

Keegan, meanwhile, says he is hearing calls in the analyst community that organizations need to consider shifting their investments from cybersecurity prevention to resiliency.

"This means accepting the inevitability that security breaches will occur," he notes. "Moreover, companies need to have a plan that enables them to recover their critical data and business applications in a timely manner to meet their service level objectives."

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HEADLINE	11/17 Instagram impersonators target thousands
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/application-security/instagram-impersonators-target-thousands-microsoft-cybersecurity
GIST	<p>Cyberattackers have targeted students at national educational institutions in the US with a sophisticated phishing campaign that impersonated Instagram. The unusual aspect of the gambit is that they used a valid domain in an effort to steal credentials, bypassing both Microsoft 365 and Exchange email protections in the process.</p> <p>The socially engineered attack, which has targeted nearly 22,000 mailboxes, used the personalized handles of Instagram users in messages informing would-be victims that there was an "unusual login" on their account, according to a blog post published on Nov. 17 by Armorblox Research Team.</p> <p>The login lure is nothing new for phishers. But attackers also sent the messages from a valid email domain, making it much harder for both users and email-scanning technology to flag messages as fraudulent, the researchers said.</p> <p>"Traditional security training advises looking at email domains before responding for any clear signs of fraud," they explained in the post. "However, in this case, a quick scan of the domain address would not have alerted the end user of fraudulent activity because of the domain's validity."</p> <p>As phishing has been around so long, attackers know that most people who use email are on to them and thus familiar with how to spot fraudulent messages. This has forced threat actors to get more creative in their tactics to try to fool users into thinking phishing emails are legitimate.</p>

Moreover, those of university age who use Instagram would likely be among the savviest of internet users, having grown up using the technology — which may be why attackers in this campaign in particular were so careful to appear authentic.

Whatever the reason, the campaign's combination of spoofing, brand impersonation, and a legitimate domain allowed attackers to send messages that successfully passed through not only Office 365 and Exchange protections, but also DKIM, DMARC, and SPF alignment email authentication checks, the researchers said.

"Upon further analysis from the Armorblox Research Team, the sender domain received a reputable score of "trustworthy" and no infections in the past 12 months of the domain's 41 months of existence," they wrote in the post.

"Unusual Login" Lure

Researchers at Armorblox said the attacks started with an email with the subject line "We Noticed an Unusual Login, [user handle]," using a common tactic to instill a sense of urgency in the recipient to get them to read the email and take action.

The body of the email impersonated the Instagram brand, and appeared to be come from the social media platform's support team, with the sender's name, Instagram profile, and email address — which was the perfectly palatable "contact@instagramsupport.net" — all appearing legitimate, they said.

The message let the user know that an unrecognized device from a specific location and machine with a specific operating system — in the case of an example shared by Armorblox, Budapest and Windows, respectively — had logged in to their account.

"This targeted email attack was socially engineered, containing information specific to the recipient — like his or her Instagram user handle — in order to instill a level of trust that this email was a legitimate email communication from Instagram," the researchers wrote.

Attackers aimed for recipients to click on a link asking them to "secure" their login details included at the bottom of the email, which lead to a fake landing page that threat actors created to exfiltrate user credentials. If someone got that far, the landing page to which the link redirects, like the email, also mimicked a legitimate Instagram page, the researchers said.

"The information within this fake landing page provides the victims a level of detail to both corroborate the details within the email and also increase the sense of urgency to take action and click the call-to-action button, 'This Wasn't Me,'" the researchers said.

If users take the bait and click to "verify" their accounts, they're directed to a second fake landing page that also impersonates Instagram credibly and are prompted to change account credentials on the premise that someone may already have stolen them.

Ironically, of course, it's the actual page itself that will be doing the stealing if the user logs in with new credentials, the researchers said.

Avoiding Compromise and Credential Theft

As threat actors get more sophisticated in how they craft phishing emails, so, too, must enterprises and their users in terms of detecting them.

Since the Instagram phishing campaign managed to [bypass native email protections](#), researchers suggested that organizations should augment built-in email security with layers that take a materially different approach to threat detection. To help them find a solution, they can use trusted research from firms such as Gartner and others on which options are the best for their particular business.

	<p>Employees also should be advised or even trained to watch out for social engineering cues that are becoming more common in phishing campaigns rather than quickly execute the requested actions received in email messages, which our brains have been trained to do, the researchers said.</p> <p>"Subject the email to an eye test that includes inspecting the sender name, sender email address, the language within the email, and any logical inconsistencies within the email," they wrote.</p> <p>Additionally, the researchers said, employing multifactor authentication and password-management best practices across both personal and business accounts can help avoid account compromise if an attacker does get ahold of a user's credentials through phishing.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Company cracks Zeppelin ransomware keys
SOURCE	https://krebsonsecurity.com/2022/11/researchers-quietly-cracked-zeppelin-ransomware-keys/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Peter is an IT manager for a technology manufacturer that got hit with a Russian ransomware strain called “Zeppelin” in May 2020. He’d been on the job less than six months, and because of the way his predecessor architected things, the company’s data backups also were encrypted by Zeppelin. After two weeks of stalling their extortionists, Peter’s bosses were ready to capitulate and pay the ransom demand. Then came the unlikely call from an FBI agent. “Don’t pay,” the agent said. “We’ve found someone who can crack the encryption.”</p> <p>Peter, who spoke candidly about the attack on condition of anonymity, said the FBI told him to contact a cybersecurity consulting firm in New Jersey called Unit 221B, and specifically its founder — Lance James. Zeppelin sprang onto the crimeware scene in December 2019, but it wasn’t long before James discovered multiple vulnerabilities in the malware’s encryption routines that allowed him to brute-force the decryption keys in a matter of hours, using nearly 100 cloud computer servers.</p> <p>In an interview with KrebsOnSecurity, James said Unit 221B was wary of advertising its ability to crack Zeppelin ransomware keys because it didn’t want to tip its hand to Zeppelin’s creators, who were likely to modify their file encryption approach if they detected it was somehow being bypassed.</p> <p>This is not an idle concern. There are multiple examples of ransomware groups doing just that after security researchers crowed about finding vulnerabilities in their ransomware code.</p> <p>“The minute you announce you’ve got a decryptor for some ransomware, they change up the code,” James said.</p> <p>But he said the Zeppelin group appears to have stopped spreading their ransomware code gradually over the past year, possibly because Unit 221B’s referrals from the FBI let them quietly help nearly two dozen victim organizations recover without paying their extortionists.</p> <p>In a blog post published today to coincide with a Black Hat Dubai talk on their discoveries, James and co-author Joel Lathrop said they were motivated to crack Zeppelin after the ransomware gang started attacking nonprofit and charity organizations.</p> <p>“What motivated us the most during the leadup to our action was the targeting of homeless shelters, nonprofits and charity organizations,” the two wrote. “These senseless acts of targeting those who are unable to respond are the motivation for this research, analysis, tools, and blog post. A general Unit 221B rule of thumb around our offices is: Don’t [REDACTED] with the homeless or sick! It will simply trigger our ADHD and we will get into that hyper-focus mode that is good if you’re a good guy, but not so great if you are an ***hole.”</p> <p>The researchers said their break came when they understood that while Zeppelin used three different types of encryption keys to encrypt files, they could undo the whole scheme by factoring or computing just one of them: An ephemeral RSA-512 public key that is randomly generated on each machine it infects.</p>

“If we can recover the RSA-512 Public Key from the registry, we can crack it and get the 256-bit AES Key that encrypts the files!” they wrote. “The challenge was that they delete the [public key] once the files are fully encrypted. Memory analysis gave us about a 5-minute window after files were encrypted to retrieve this public key.”

Unit 221B ultimately built a “Live CD” version of Linux that victims could run on infected systems to extract that RSA-512 key. From there, they would load the keys into a cluster of 800 CPUs donated by hosting giant **Digital Ocean** that would then start cracking them. The company also used that same donated infrastructure to help victims decrypt their data using the recovered keys.

Jon is another grateful Zeppelin ransomware victim who was aided by Unit 221B’s decryption efforts. Like Peter, Jon asked that his last name and that of his employer be omitted from the story, but he’s in charge of IT for a mid-sized managed service provider that got hit with Zeppelin in July 2020. The attackers that savaged Jon’s company managed to phish credentials and a multi-factor authentication token for some tools the company used to support customers, and in short order they’d seized control over the servers and backups for a healthcare provider customer.

Jon said his company was reluctant to pay a ransom in part because it wasn’t clear from the hackers’ demands whether the ransom amount they demanded would provide a key to unlock all systems, and that it would do so safely.

“They want you to unlock your data with their software, but you can’t trust that,” Jon said. “You want to use your own software or someone else who’s trusted to do it.”

In August 2022, the FBI and the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [issued a joint warning on Zeppelin](#), saying the FBI had “observed instances where Zeppelin actors executed their malware multiple times within a victim’s network, resulting in the creation of different IDs or file extensions, for each instance of an attack; this results in the victim needing several unique decryption keys.”

The advisory says Zeppelin has attacked “a range of businesses and critical infrastructure organizations, including defense contractors, educational institutions, manufacturers, technology companies, and especially organizations in the healthcare and medical industries. Zeppelin actors have been known to request ransom payments in Bitcoin, with initial amounts ranging from several thousand dollars to over a million dollars.”

The FBI and CISA say the Zeppelin actors gain access to victim networks by exploiting weak Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) credentials, exploiting SonicWall firewall vulnerabilities, and phishing campaigns. Prior to deploying Zeppelin ransomware, actors spend one to two weeks mapping or enumerating the victim network to identify data enclaves, including cloud storage and network backups, the alert notes.

Jon said he felt so lucky after connecting with James and hearing about their decryption work, that he toyed with the idea of buying a lottery ticket that day.

“This just doesn’t usually happen,” Jon said. “It’s 100 percent like winning the lottery.”

By the time Jon’s company got around to decrypting their data, they were forced by regulators to prove that no patient data had been exfiltrated from their systems. All told, it took his employer two months to fully recover from the attack.

“I definitely feel like I was ill-prepared for this attack,” Jon said. “One of the things I’ve learned from this is the importance of forming your core team and having those people who know what their roles and responsibilities are ahead of time. Also, trying to vet new vendors you’ve never met before and build trust

	relationships with them is very difficult to do when you have customers down hard now and they're waiting on you to help them get back up."
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HEADLINE	11/17 Ransomware hits Michigan public schools
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/138677/cyber-crime/public-schools-michigan-ransomware.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Public schools in two Michigan counties were forced to halt their activities, including the lessons, after a ransomware attack.</p> <p>Public schools in Jackson and Hillsdale counties, Michigan, reopen after a closure of two days caused by a ransomware attack that hit its systems.</p> <p>The public schools started experiencing a systems outage affecting critical operating systems on Monday, the outage occurred because they were victims of a ransomware attack detected over the weekend.</p> <p>Jackson County Intermediate School District Superintendent Kevin Oxley announced that the systems were taken offline to contain the damage.</p> <p>The schools notified law enforcement and engaged external cybersecurity advisors to investigate the incident and receive help in restoring its systems in a secure way.</p> <p>As a precautionary measure, the schools asked everyone to refrain from using any school-issued devices.</p> <p>"Thanks to the around-the-clock work by our tech team and cybersecurity experts, we are prepared to welcome students back to school tomorrow, Thursday, November 17, 2022." reads the announcement from the Jackson County Intermediate School District.</p> <p><i>"Our number one priority was to get kids back in school and we're thrilled to be able to do that tomorrow. While our restoration efforts continue, we prioritized bringing essential systems back online in order to allow us to safely resume operations and reopen school buildings across Jackson and Hillsdale counties. However, students will continue to have limited access to several technology resources when they return tomorrow, as our teams continue to work on restoring additional systems."</i></p> <p>At this time, the attack has yet to be claimed by any cybercrime group.</p> <p>School districts are privileged targets of ransomware gangs, in September one of the US largest School districts, the Los Angeles Unified School District, suffered a ransomware attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Eastern WA town new bitcoin mining hub?
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/11/tiny-eastern-wa-town-could-become-bitcoin-mining-hub
GIST	<p>Usk, Wash. — In the bowels of the old Ponderay Newsprint mill, the piercing sound of loud, whirring fans echo off the walls as thousands of blinking computers stacked on top of one another frantically make trillions of calculations in search of bitcoin.</p> <p>The rest of the massive building, full of mechanical contraptions that used to turn wood pellets into newspaper, stands silent.</p> <p>The company that once ran this place went bankrupt a couple of years ago. Now the property has been taken over by California investment firm Allrise Capital, with plans to transform parts of the mill into one of the largest cryptocurrency mines in the state and perhaps, eventually, the nation.</p>

The operation represents an ambitious bet, coming amid the plunge in value of bitcoin from heights of over \$60,000 in May to around \$20,000 today and the tanking of many crypto mining operations in the Northwest.

No longer are mill workers parking in the gravel lot outside. Their vehicles have been replaced by state-of-the-art Chinese Bitmain “Antboxes” — decked-out shipping containers stuffed with networked computers called “miners” and cooling units. In a process called “proof of work,” computers like these play a giant guessing game to figure out the answers to complex math problems. Solved equations are added as “blocks” to a “blockchain” — a ledger of transactions shared and built and verified by all the computers on the network. Each new block creates a new digital currency such as bitcoin, which is rewarded to the problem-solver.

Crypto enthusiasts contend this process is what makes digital currencies like bitcoin secure, since no one has the authority to make changes by themselves. But the system also encourages a massive energy drain: More computers “mining” at once means better odds of winning. And these days, companies like Allrise are using a lot of computers.

[Announced in February](#), the partnership with Bitmain calls for 500 megawatts’ worth of equipment and over 150,000 miners, including new water-cooled units. Ruslan Zinurov, CEO of Allrise, [told the crypto-website Cointelegraph](#) that the partnership would “catapult our growth plan of building one of North America’s largest sustainable digital asset mining platforms.”

Usk, an unincorporated town with a population of about 1,000 an hour’s drive north from Spokane, sits along the Pend Oreille River. It’s home to a bar and grill, a general store, and a lumber yard. Until a couple of years ago, the Ponderay Newsprint mill was the largest employer in the county, with about 150 workers.

Residents who moved here expected quiet solitude, to get away from the hustle and bustle of civilization. But the tranquility has been disrupted by the din of crypto mining, said Ben Richards, a U.S. Army veteran who lives across the river.

Now Richards and others are trying to figure out how the new industry is going to transform their little community, as it has transformed others across the nation. And state officials are eyeing the project, wondering if it will disrupt Gov. Jay Inslee’s clean-energy goals.

Elsewhere, media reports talk of crypto mining projects [humming like jet engines](#), [turning lakes into hot tubs](#), gobbling up all the electricity and [propping up once-defunct coal plants](#). In a report published last month, the White House recommended that the industry be more closely monitored and regulated, as estimates show it consuming between 120 and 240 billion kilowatt-hours worldwide last year — more than the total annual electricity usage of either Argentina or Australia.

The environmental impacts in Usk are still unclear, as it’s just getting started. But questions remain about how much electricity the project will use, whether it will all come from renewable sources, how loud it’ll get when everything is up and running, and where the computers will go once they become obsolete.

Bubble bursts

Despite the concerns, there is little regulation of crypto mining at the state or federal levels, leaving local utilities to come up with a hodgepodge of solutions.

In the 2010s, digital prospectors journeyed from far and wide to the Columbia Basin in Central Washington, where they could have direct access to hydroelectricity from the region’s dams. [A Politico Magazine article](#) detailed tales of old shops and fruit warehouses being turned into mining facilities, of Chinese businessmen arriving in private planes, of outsiders bringing suitcases of cash, and of rogue miners secretly sapping electricity and causing infrastructure damage, as well as at least one fire.

Community members had “substantial reservations,” Steve Wright, former head of the Chelan County Public Utilities District, testified in Congress earlier this year during a [subcommittee hearing on the energy impacts of blockchain](#). People worried about how easy it was for crypto miners to leave based on the whims of the market, thanks to how portable their computer systems were. They also were critical about how few jobs the industry created and wondered if it was the best use of the region’s hydropower.

“Whether cryptocurrency’s value to the society is sufficient for a community to want mining operations based in their area was debated in Chelan County and at best left many of our customer-owners perplexed,” Wright said in his testimony in January.

The utilities in Chelan, Douglas and Grant counties each came up with their own ways to raise prices for crypto miners, due to their large energy loads and the high investment risk they presented. Some crypto miners left. Others folded or went bankrupt.

“The thrill is gone” is how [a recent Seattle Times headline](#) put it.

Those who stayed are more like any other customer, said Louis Szablya, a senior manager at Grant County Public Utilities District. Some are local, with no intention of leaving anytime soon. And while crypto miners’ requests for electricity have been increasing again in the past year or so, the demands have been modest by comparison to those in the 2010s.

“It’s no longer the tail wagging the dog,” Szablya said. “It’s actually just regular customers and regular industries that have been making requests. And then crypto mining is also there.”

Where Washington once was seen as a place where crypto could boom, last November it comprised just 4% of the crypto mining done in the nation, as miners flock to other states that greet them with more open arms, according to the [University of Cambridge Bitcoin Electricity Consumption Index](#).

Since China banned crypto mining, leading companies like Bitmain to send their computers overseas, the United States accounts for about one-third of all operations. The White House report estimated that crypto mining takes up about 1% of the electricity generated in the country, and produces between 25 and 50 metric tons of carbon dioxide — similar to the amount of emissions from diesel fuel used by the nation’s trains.

The report also notes that Bitcoin produces over 30,000 tons of electronic waste a year. That’s as much as all the electronic waste generated by the Netherlands. Much of that doesn’t get recycled.

The report recommends the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy help make new standards “for the responsible design, development, and use of environmentally responsible crypto-asset technologies,” with an aim to draw less energy, consume less water and make less noise.

It could be a while before anything concrete happens, though, as the nation tries to figure out the consequences of the industry.

The real killer

Merkle Standard, a subsidiary of Allrise that manages the crypto operation in Usk, has permission to use up to 100 megawatts of energy per year, exceeding the rest of the Pend Oreille County PUD’s customers combined. It’s also more than the output of the local utility’s Box Canyon Dam, which used to power the newsprint mill.

That might only be the beginning. Merkle Standard had a study conducted to look at how much it’d have to pay to increase that intake even more, up to 600 megawatts, which would make it one of the largest crypto mining operations in the country. That may be an unlikely outcome, though, as the Bonneville Power Administration estimates it would cost more than \$100 million to build out infrastructure.

Even getting to 145 megawatts could be expensive. BPA estimates that would cost Merkle Standard over \$40 million total.

Either scenario would likely take a few years.

“The real killer is not the amount of money that needs to be put down. It’s the time, the three years,” said Monty Stahl, COO of Merkle Standard.

More recently, the company requested a study to see what it would take to add another 70 megawatts to turn the newsprint mill back on. It’s a promise they made back when Merkle Standard’s parent company, Allrise Capital, bought the facility in 2020 for \$18.1 million.

Stahl said he’s committed to bringing jobs back to town and to building a “sustainable” operation. He estimates crypto mining could bring in 40 jobs, and the newsprint mill another 150. Whether Allrise is serious about bringing the newsprint mill back online [has been the source of much local speculation](#). According to Stahl, the company is buying renewable energy credits, and while it isn’t getting power directly from nearby hydropower projects, he believes the proximity of the facility naturally takes advantage of those resources. (Tracking where electricity comes from is not an exact science.) Plus, he said, the company can work with the PUD to curtail its energy use during times of peak demand.

Not only can crypto mining be carbon-neutral, Stahl argued, it can be “carbon-negative” by repurposing heat generated by the servers. For example, last winter, that heat was used in place of propane to warm the newsprint mill, which one day may be reactivated.

Skeptical of sustainability

Anything that takes so much electricity can represent “an opportunity that is lost,” said Glenn Blackmon, senior energy policy adviser with the state.

That power could be used to help build out electric vehicle-charging infrastructure or to convert buildings from natural gas to high-efficiency electricity, he said.

“We need a lot of clean electricity ... to do the energy transformation of our economy, that is necessary for us to meet our climate goals,” Blackmon said. “And adding a novel load like blockchain processing, at best, is an additional requirement for clean electricity.”

There is also a scenario, Blackmon said, where Merkle Standard could wind up in a situation where it negotiates to get power from somewhere else, possibly introducing fossil fuels to the mix, he said. He said the state’s Energy Office will be pitching the Legislature to close a loophole in the Clean Energy Transformation Act and prevent that from happening.

Otherwise, the state isn’t getting in the way of the project. Just keeping an eye on it. It isn’t really in the state’s purview to decide what is or isn’t a good use of electricity, Blackmon said.

“There’s lots of different things people might do with electricity that they haven’t done historically,” he said.

The potential environmental threat of cryptocurrency has garnered a few local opponents in Pend Oreille County, who have caused a couple of hiccups.

Richards, the Army veteran who runs a website called Protect Pend Oreille, and retired biologist Ed Styskel protested the county’s determination of non-significance for the project. Both argued that Merkle Standard was not forthright in how loud the full operation could be and how that noise might affect local wildlife, like the American white pelican that hangs out in the area part of the year.

In May, the county hearing examiner shot down the appeal and approved the conditional-use permit, with the requirement that the crypto operation follows state noise rules.

Stahl calls Richards a “fiction fantasy writer.” Stahl contends the old wood-chip processor was louder than the crypto equipment. But, Richards notes, the newsprint mill didn’t run 24/7.

The crypto operation has also come under fire from Responsible Growth NE Washington, a local environmental group that got its start five years ago protesting — and effectively chasing away — a proposed smelter in nearby Newport.

“When you want that much power, somewhere along that line ... you’re going to find coal,” said Phyllis Kardos, a retired teacher and a leader of Responsible Growth.

Kardos says she isn’t opposed to reviving the mill and bringing back those jobs. But she worries about the impact of an industry that takes up so much electricity and, in her view, gives so little back.

“Someone has to speak for the environment,” she said. “People want to come here, not because of a smelter, or not because of a cryptocurrency. They want to come here because of the rural lifestyle, the environment that we have now.”

One question that remains is how long Merkle Standard will last in the current market conditions. Maybe the market will swing up again, as it has done before, and Merkle will reap the profits.

Or perhaps the company will do as others have and take its miners to cheaper pastures. Merkle already shipped some computers to a server farm in South Carolina, where Stahl said the process was much smoother.

For now, Stahl says they have no plans of leaving Usk as long as it makes business sense to stay.

“Maybe I’m just a sucker for northeast [Washington] because I grew up in Colville,” he said. “But whenever I can, I’m gonna try to build it here. If it becomes economically unfeasible, we’ll go somewhere else.”

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HEADLINE	11/17 False report on Iran protests went viral
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/16/iran-protests-social-media-death-penalty
GIST	<p>This weekend, a post revealing a terrible atrocity in Iran went viral on social media. “Iran sentences 15,000 protesters to death – as a ‘hard lesson’ for all rebels,” read the text on a now deleted infographic posted to Instagram on 12 November.</p> <p>In just two days, the original post received over 315,000 likes and was reposted thousands of times through the Stories feature. Public figures including Justin Trudeau, Viola Davis, Elijah Wood, Sophie Turner and Peter Frampton reposted the message on Instagram and Twitter. The infographic continued to be shared and reshared in the days after it originally surfaced, viewed millions of times.</p> <p>But its claim that 15,000 protesters were sentenced to death is not true. The original post has since been taken down, as well as most reposts.</p> <p>At least five protesters have now been officially sentenced to death, according to the media centre for the judiciary, one for allegedly setting fire to a government building.</p> <p>The viral posts cited a Newsweek article that itself is based on an article by Iran’s state-run media. The article says 227 of the 290 members of Iran’s parliament have signed a letter urging the judiciary to consider severe, unspecified punishments for protesters. The original headline made a bold claim – “Iran protesters refuse to back down as 15,000 face execution” – which was updated on 15 November.</p>

The post that went viral contains an exaggeration of true elements. First, there have been terrible atrocities carried out against protesters in the past few months. The Norway-based Iran Human Rights group says [at least 326 people](#), including 43 children and 25 women, have been killed by security forces in the two months since anti-government protests began. The 15,000 number may have come from a top United Nations official, as [reported by CNN](#), who said that over 14,000 protesters had been arrested in Iran in the past two months. According to [estimates](#) from [Hrana](#), more than 16,000 people are currently imprisoned because of protest activity.

Iran has a history of mass executions, most notably in 1988, when, [according to Amnesty International](#), at least 5,000 political prisoners were killed.

Today, political prisoners are often beaten, [threatened with rape by guards](#) and tortured, and protesters are brutally treated and killed in the street by Iranian officials. On Tuesday, footage emerged of [police opening fire at a Tehran metro station](#) and beating women on a train. The reality doesn't require sensationalization to be shocking.

This story is not the only piece of widely shared misinformation about political unrest in [Iran](#). Other stories also cite reporting from Iranian state-controlled media, and some stories blatantly spread false narratives whose origin may be unclear.

Most foreign journalists have not been able to safely enter Iran to report on the protests, so western audiences and the diaspora abroad are reliant on unverified social media posts, first-hand accounts and Iranian media for information.

"Traditional media in Iran are heavily censored by the government – some are state run, and those that are not state-run are heavily censored," said Shahin Milani, the executive director of the US-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

Joan Donovan, research director of the Harvard Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and co-author of the 2022 book *Meme Wars*, said: "We get drawn into information that we think is being kept from us, and claims that involve numbers that are completely novel and outrageous do tend to travel very quickly on social media."

She added: "People who are sharing this particular post about 15,000 people being sentenced to death are trying to do the right thing – are trying to stop political oppression from happening – but they may not realize that they're being duped into spreading propaganda that doesn't reflect the situation of protesters on the ground."

Widespread protests in Iran began against Ali Khamenei's regime following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September three days after she was detained by Iran's religious morality police for allegedly not wearing proper hijab. Shortly after, [TikTok videos](#) of young women without hijabs speaking about life in Iran received millions of views. [Videos](#) of women without the mandatory hijab walking and marching through the streets of Iranian cities, despite the risk of arrest, receive tens of thousands of likes on Twitter. Montage videos set to traditional Persian music poking fun at government officials and religious leaders flood WhatsApp channels. [Clips](#) of a trend wherein often young anti-government Iranians knock the turbans off Muslim clerics in Iran reach far throughout the diaspora on social media.

For Iranians, social media is not only a window into the world beyond the Islamic Republic's state-controlled media, but a powerful tool for reaching fellow citizens in a country where landlines are tapped, mobile data is severely restricted and all media are routinely monitored by a government unsympathetic to political dissidents.

More than 60 journalists have been arrested in Iran since the beginning of the protests, according to Amnesty International. Media control has been central to maintaining power for the Islamic Republic, and reporting that paints the regime in an unfavorable light is met with swift retaliation.

“This is where social media becomes a paradox. The same places that people would look for information about the protests are also going to be places where they’re going to find misinformation,” says Donovan. “It’s a free-for-all.”

Protests in Iran against the current regime are not a new phenomenon, and neither is the brutal treatment of protesters and political dissidents.

But the difference this time is the reception by the international community and diaspora, with social media being critical to generating such support and solidarity. Digital natives are driving the movement and this wave of protests.

On Wednesday, a new [viral post was shared](#), arguing that factchecking the claims about who is sentenced to death is “just semantics” and including a slide saying “let’s not get hung up on technicalities”. But social media is imperative to sharing resources as well as accurate information. When state-controlled media can’t be trusted to report the truth, social media users must factcheck even well-meaning posters.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Why the crypto collapse matters
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/17/briefing/crypto-collapse-ftx.html
GIST	<p>How could a \$32 billion company vaporize overnight? That’s what anyone watching the sudden collapse of FTX, a hot cryptocurrency start-up that plunged into bankruptcy last week, might be puzzling over.</p> <p>It will take time — and multiple federal investigations — to fully understand what happened behind the scenes at FTX, a Bahamas-based crypto exchange. But the impact is already becoming clear.</p> <p>Lawmakers are calling for more oversight. Crypto die-hards are trying to distance themselves. Critics of this sector of finance are crowing. And for those of you who had, until now, managed to ignore the rise and rise and rise of crypto as a phenomenon? First of all, good for you. And second, you may want to watch this one play out. I’ll explain why shortly.</p> <p>But first, here is the simplest explanation of what happened that I can manage: FTX let people and companies buy and sell digital currencies, holding billions of dollars’ worth of customer deposits.</p> <p>FTX’s founder, Sam Bankman-Fried, also created an investment fund that trades cryptocurrencies called Alameda Research. The businesses were supposed to be separate, but this year, Alameda needed cash and apparently dipped into FTX’s customer deposits. Then, this month, FTX customers became worried about their deposits and rushed to withdraw them, setting off a bank run and pushing FTX into bankruptcy.</p> <p>The apparent commingling of funds between Alameda and FTX is highly suspicious and could lead to criminal fraud charges and lawsuits. The Securities and Exchange Commission and Justice Department are investigating. I want to explain today why the disintegration of FTX matters — it’s more than simply one man’s financial catastrophe.</p> <p>Three reasons</p> <p>1. Crypto went mainstream in the pandemic. Regulation has yet to catch up.</p> <p>Cryptocurrencies were part of overlapping investment manias — including meme stocks, trading cards, NFTs and sneakers — that got people chasing speculative investments over the past few years. But not everyone buying in understood the level of risk involved.</p> <p>If a bank fails, the government might step in and bail it out. A hallmark of crypto is that it is largely unregulated — buyer beware. Hacks can’t be reversed, misplaced funds can’t be retrieved by calling customer service, and a failing crypto exchange is not likely to get a government bailout. Investors have few protections.</p>

Risky bets at several crypto projects once deemed valuable have already led to “[death spirals](#)” this year, incinerating billions of dollars’ worth of investors’ money. But FTX and Bankman-Fried stand out. He appeared on magazine covers, schmoozed regulators, grew his profile in philanthropy and politics and even sponsored a sports arena in Miami. He made hundreds of investments in smaller crypto projects and aggressively bailed out failing ones.

Evangelists for cryptocurrencies and their underlying technology promote them as investment vehicles that eliminate the need for faith in people and institutions. But Bankman-Fried made a point of fostering trust: from investors, journalists, politicians and charities. Now he’s a pariah, and he brought all of the crypto industry under scrutiny.

2. FTX’s collapse is connected to the broader tech industry retreat.

Bankman-Fried is already drawing [comparisons to Bernie Madoff](#). And just as Madoff’s Ponzi scheme fell apart during the 2008 financial crisis, FTX’s collapse arrives amid a broader pullback for the tech industry. Tech stocks have crashed. Venture capital funding is drying up. Nearly 800 tech companies have laid off more than 120,000 workers this year, with cuts hitting Meta, Amazon and Twitter.

The tough times in tech can be traced to interest rates for borrowing money. For more than a decade, rates were low, pushing investors to chase risk and pour money into high-growth tech companies. Now, rates are rising, just as the pandemic-fueled growth of the last two years fades. The rate increases have hurt tech company valuations and access to capital — including those focused on crypto.

3. There’s more to come.

FTX’s bankruptcy filings list more [than one million creditors](#). In addition to people who used the platform to store their cryptocurrency investments and investors who backed the company directly, numerous funds and crypto start-ups had assets locked up there.

Investment managers that dabbled in crypto “should really be considering whether they should have relatively new, relatively unproven, relatively unregulated assets in their retirement plans,” said Marcia Wagner, founder of the Wagner Law Group, a firm focused on employee benefits. “There are certain types of assets that frankly don’t belong.”

The Aftermath of FTX’s Downfall

The sudden collapse of the crypto exchange has left the industry stunned.

- **A Company in Disarray:** The new chief executive of FTX, who helped manage Enron after its collapse, said that he had never seen [“such a complete failure of corporate control.”](#)
- **The Scope of the Meltdown:** FTX could owe money to [more than one million creditors](#), according to the first substantial court filing since [the company’s bankruptcy](#).
- **Investors Under Scrutiny:** Venture capital firms and investment funds showered nearly \$2 billion on FTX with few strings attached. [Now, they are facing questions, too.](#)
- **A Pall on a Philanthropy Movement:** The fall of FTX dealt a [significant blow to the “effective altruism” movement](#) that is deeply tied to the company’s founder, Sam Bankman-Fried.

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HEADLINE	11/17 WA agencies prepare for Twitter shutdown
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/state-agencies-preparing-potential-shutdown-twitter/D64IJR5VOJC3XGR2HDFCDMCWAI/
GIST	<p>As Twitter employees continue to leave the company after Elon Musk’s ultimatum to pledge to “hardcore” work or resign with severance, several Washington state agencies are alerting their followers of other ways they can keep in touch and keep receiving the updates they need.</p> <p>The Seattle Office of Emergency Management says you can sign up for free emergency alerts by texting SEATTLE to 67283. You can also get customized alerts, which can be set up at alert.seattle.gov.</p>

	<p>The Washington State Department of Transportation says you can continue using its website and app, or sign up for text or email alerts. It also has Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Reddit accounts.</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Natural Resources says it can be found on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.</p> <p>The Washington Emergency Management Division tweeted that its website will still be up.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Gig Harbor Police Department told residents not to call 911 should the social media site go offline.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 More Twitter workers flee after 'ultimatum'
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/twitter-employees-flee-musk-ultimatum/507-0871b29d-143d-4370-af13-2ab940a42a79
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO — Twitter continued to bleed engineers and other workers on Thursday, after new owner Elon Musk gave them a choice to pledge to “hardcore” work or resign with severance pay.</p> <p>Some took to Twitter to announce they were signing off after Musk’s deadline to make the pledge. A number of employees took to a private forum outside of the company’s messaging board to discuss their planned departure, asking questions about how it might jeopardize their U.S. visas or if they would get the promised severance pay, according to an employee fired earlier this week who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.</p> <p>While it’s not clear how many of Twitter’s already-decimated staff took Musk up on his offer, the newest round of departures means the platform is continuing to lose workers just at it is gearing up for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, one of the busiest events on Twitter that can overwhelm its systems if things go haywire.</p> <p>“To all the Tweeps who decided to make today your last day: thanks for being incredible teammates through the ups and downs. I can’t wait to see what you do next,” tweeted one employee, Esther Crawford, who is remaining at the company and has been working on the overhaul of the platform's verification system.</p> <p>Since taking over Twitter less than three weeks ago, Musk has booted half of the company's full-time staff of 7,500 and an untold number of contractors responsible for content moderation and other crucial efforts.</p> <p>He fired top executives on his first day as Twitter's owner, while others left voluntarily in the ensuing days. Earlier this week, he began firing a small group of engineers who took issue with him publicly or in the company's internal Slack messaging system.</p> <p>Then overnight on Wednesday, Musk sent an email to the remaining staff at Twitter, saying that it is a software and servers company at its heart and he asked employees to decide by Thursday evening if they want to remain a part of the business.</p> <p>Musk wrote that employees “will need to be extremely hardcore” to build “a breakthrough Twitter 2.0” and that long hours at high intensity will be needed for success.</p> <p>But in a Thursday email, Musk backpedaled on his insistence that everyone work from the office. His initial rejection of remote work had alienated many employees who survived the layoffs.</p> <p>He softened his earlier tone in an email to employees, writing that “all that is required for approval is that your manager takes responsibility for ensuring you are making an excellent contribution.” Workers would</p>

	<p>also be expected to have “in-person meetings with your colleagues on a reasonable cadence, ideally weekly, but not less than once per month.”</p> <p>As of 7 p.m. Pacific Time, the No. 1 topic trending in the United States was “RIPTwitter” followed by the names of other social media platforms: “Tumblr,” “Mastodon” and “MySpace.”</p> <p>Twitter did not respond to a message seeking comment.</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	11/18 Former college student jailed 7 ½ years
SOURCE	https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2022/11/18/former-depaul-student-sentenced-prison-terrorism-case
GIST	<p>A former DePaul University student who tried to aid the Islamic State was sentenced Thursday to seven and a half years in prison followed by 10 years of supervised release, The Chicago Sun-Times reported.</p> <p>According to the <i>Sun-Times</i>, federal prosecutors said Thomas Osadzinski, 23, “designed a process that uses a computer script to make Islamic State propaganda more conveniently accessed and disseminated by users on the social media platform Telegram.”</p> <p>Osadzinski shared his computer script with people he thought were ISIS supporters but who were actually undercover FBI agents and members of law enforcement, according to WTTW News.</p> <p>Prosecutors alleged that Osadzinski’s “fascination” with ISIS began the year before his arrest in 2018, after the FBI received a tip that he posted in chat rooms stating he wanted to commit “jihad.”</p> <p>“The defendant knew ISIS needed help in the ‘digital realm,’ and he offered that help,” Assistant U.S. Attorneys Barry Jonas and Melody Wells, along with Alexandra Hughes of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section, wrote in a sentencing memorandum this month.</p> <p>When Osadzinski was arrested in November 2019, there was evidence in his apartment that he had researched the agent who handled the case. Law enforcement authorities also found a drawing with a written statement saying, “Stop their terrorist” and a picture of a “terrorist” pointing a gun at an agent lying dead on the floor, covered with blood.</p> <p>Before he was sentenced, Osadzinski, 23, told U.S. District Judge Robert Gettleman, “I failed everyone, and I failed myself,” the <i>Sun-Times</i> reported. “I was in a dark place when all of this happened and, looking back, I see how alone I felt.” He added, “I completely reject ISIS.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Rockets target US-led coalition base Syria
SOURCE	https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/18112022
GIST	<p>ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Thursday that rockets targeted a military base housing US-led coalition troops in Syria’s eastern province of Deir ez-Zor without causing casualties.</p> <p>“On the evening of Nov. 17, 2022, at approximately 9:32pm local time in Syria, rockets targeted coalition forces at the Green Village base in northeast Syria,” CENTCOM said, adding that the attack resulted in no casualties or material damages.</p> <p>The Green Village military installation is located in Deir ez-Zor province in eastern Syria, within areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) north of the Euphrates River.</p>

	<p>“Attacks of this kind place coalition forces and the civilian populace at risk and undermine the hard-earned stability and security of Syria and the region,” CENTCOM spokesperson Joe Buccino stated.</p> <p>There have been at least 21 rocket and drone attacks against sites housing American troops in Iraq and Syria this year, according to data compiled by Rudaw English. Suck attacks are often attributed to Iran-backed militias and factions, but have never been claimed.</p> <p>Earlier in November, at least 15 pro-Iran fighters were killed in Deir ez-Zor on a strike targeting their convoy along the Iraqi-Syrian border, but the US denied any involvement in the strike.</p> <p>CENTCOM in August announced the killing of four suspected Iran-backed militants in northeast Syria in response to an attack a day prior that targeted US facilities, including the Green Village military base.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 IS: Lebanon collapse drives recruitment
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63386636
GIST	<p>Ahmed is still a teenager, but instead of studying he spends every day at work.</p> <p>He lives in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, one of the poorest places on the Mediterranean. Despite the hours he puts in, he leaves with just a few dollars a week. He needs to support his sick mother, but his back-breaking manual job earns him barely enough to feed them both.</p> <p>That sense of hopelessness led him to search for a way out. In an internet café in Tripoli, he began chatting to a man who told Ahmed he was a recruiter for the Islamic State group - the radical Sunni Islamist militants who once controlled large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq, and who have committed atrocities and terror attacks throughout the region and around the world.</p> <p>"I was studying Sharia [Islamic laws], and day after day they taught us about jihad," Ahmed told me. "They told us about Iraq and the Islamic State group [IS]. We loved IS, because it was famous. I was contacted by a man in prison, and he told me 'I'm going to send you there'."</p> <p>Slight and quietly-spoken, it's hard to imagine Ahmed being a fighter. We talked about the terrible crimes that the group had committed, and I pressed him to explain why he would want to be a part of something like that.</p> <p>"I wanted to join IS and be a mujahid because I couldn't cope with the crisis here", he answers slowly. "Then I would get close to my God, and live comfortably, and not always be worried about the cost of living."</p> <p>Ahmed had made his decision. He told the recruiter he wanted to sign up, to leave Lebanon and travel to fight for the group in Iraq and Syria. But within hours, he was picked up by the police and arrested. Lebanese Army intelligence officers questioned him for five days before he was released. It made him regret his choice, but he still doesn't have a solution to his many problems.</p> <p>"It makes me want to kill myself. I owe people money that I borrowed to get furniture for my room but I can't afford to give it back. We don't know what will happen in the future."</p> <p>In Tripoli's backstreets, hope is in short supply. So is electricity, water, fuel, medicines and jobs. In the last year, around a hundred young Lebanese men are said to have joined IS. It's not only about signing up to the extreme ideology the group represents. They're trying to escape the grinding poverty of a country in crisis.</p> <p>For many, their religious sect or family background means opportunities are closed to them. That struggle for survival has seen some young men take desperate measures.</p>

Nabil Sari is a prominent judge in Tripoli. He's dealt with these cases before.

"There are no job opportunities, no school or study opportunities. And some of those who joined IS because of that, they regretted it, and tried to contact their families to come back - but they can't."

The Islamic State group is far from the force it once was in the Middle East. For a time it controlled a swathe of land which it designated a caliphate [an Islamic State] across Syria and Iraq. The bulk of the group was defeated in a bloody battle in the Syrian town of Baghouz in 2019.

But the small remainder who weren't killed or imprisoned continue to attack targets in the areas it once held. And earlier this year, reports of those attacks started to contain details of Lebanese perpetrators.

Mohammad Sablounh is a lawyer who represents several of their families. Together we headed to Wadi Khaled where many of the missing men lived. It's a tough area, mired in poverty. Children play all day with makeshift toys in dusty alleyways. The crisis means many don't get the chance to go to school.

"Here is separated from the state," Mohammed explained. "Look at these poor areas. Nobody cares about it. The country is not doing its duty towards its citizens. And this poor class will be used and be recruited for IS."

A year ago, Bakr Saif vanished. He was weeks away from getting married. Although he'd been arrested and spent time in prison, he was building a future with his fiancée. He didn't tell his mother Umm Saif he was planning to leave.

"He told us he was going to see his fiancée, and would be back at noon," she told me, her eyes filling with tears. "And he went, and he never came back."

"We heard the news on social media," his father Mahdi continues. "It was on all of our phones. We just didn't believe it. And then everybody started to shout and cry." Umm pauses and wipes her eyes. "He was happy in life, he was preparing for his wedding and he was happy. He'd been released from prison. He was a very good guy. Respectful. Polite. Whatever I say you might say 'She's his mother', but this is the truth."

Less than a month later, Umm received a voicemail. A sinister, computer-altered voice told her that her son had been killed fighting for IS in Iraq. Unusually, it described him as "killed" rather than "martyred", the latter being much more like the language a genuine IS message would use.

Bakr's parents don't believe the voicemail, or what the Lebanese authorities have told them about his fate. They think he never left Lebanon, and remains hidden in custody somewhere in the country. Bakr's father Mahdi showed me into his son's flat. It's neat and tidy, but empty, and feels abandoned. The gold-wrapped chocolates Bakr bought ready for his wedding still lie on a display stand, uneaten.

The Iraqi army says Bakr left Lebanon and travelled there to join IS. They claim he was involved in a militant attack on an army base in Diyala that killed 10 soldiers. Days later nine IS members were killed in a retaliatory air strike by Iraqi forces. Half of them were Lebanese.

The Iraqi forces say Bakr was one of them. They insist they're completely sure of his identity, and say they carry out DNA testing on the bodies of those they kill to confirm it. I spoke to Iraqi Army General Yahya Rasoul Abdulla about the men who are leaving Lebanon to join IS. He had strong words for them.

"My message to the Arab world, and specifically to the Lebanese youth, is that this terrorist organisation is using you as wood for the fire. You can see and ask the Iraqi people who lived under IS control - they were killing people, raping women, enslaving women, destroying heritage, destroying all infrastructure, they even destroyed the prophet's graves. Don't be the fuel for their wars, don't be used by them."

"The Iraqi army are everywhere. Wherever this organisation is going, in the desert, the mountains, the valleys, we will chase them and we will kill them."

From a peak at the start of this year, the numbers joining IS have begun to slow. The stories of those who left are now well-known in Tripoli, and that makes the prospect of following them less enticing.

But as Lebanon continues to struggle with its crippling financial crisis, and its politicians stall on forming a new government months after the country's elections, life isn't getting any easier. And so the IS recruiters continue to circle, hoping to attract a new intake of disenfranchised Lebanese youth.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Not sure how much equipment to Taliban
SOURCE	https://taskandpurpose.com/news/military-equipment-taliban-afghanistan-sigar-report/
GIST	<p>It's been more than a year since the U.S. military's chaotic withdrawal from Kabul, and the Defense Department actually has no clear idea how much U.S.-funded military equipment fell into the Taliban's hands in Afghanistan, according to a new report from a top government watchdog.</p> <p>While a previous Pentagon inspector general report in August estimated that roughly \$7.12 billion in U.S.-funded military equipment was still in the inventory of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) when the central government in Kabul collapsed, a new assessment from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) revealed last week that the Pentagon "has struggled for years with accurately accounting for the equipment it provided to the ANDSF."</p> <p>The lack of accurate accounting stemmed from using the Core Inventory Management System (Core IMS) despite "limitations with the utility and accuracy of that system" reported by SIGAR since at least 2008.</p> <p>Indeed, a 2020 DoD IG audit revealed that Core IMS was never utilized at more than half of the Afghan-maintained weapons storage sites across the country simply because they lacked consistent access to electricity or the internet.</p> <p>In addition, U.S. military officials concluded since at least 2014 that ANDSF personnel were "not entering information correctly into the system," and maintained inventory records using "hard copy documents, handwritten records, and some Microsoft Excel spreadsheets," according to the SIGAR report — the same system that created the conditions for 'ghost soldiers,' or nonexistent personnel created solely to funnel money and equipment to (often-illicit) sources.</p> <p>"As a result of the issues with the Core Inventory Management System and the regularly documented issues with DoD's ability to account for equipment provided to the Afghan government, it remains unclear whether the \$7.1 billion figure reported to Congress is accurate," according to the SIGAR assessment.</p> <p>Translation: the U.S. has no clear picture of how much military equipment it accidentally funneled into Taliban arsenals as the militant group swept across the country.</p> <p>As Task & Purpose previously reported, that \$7.12 billion amount originally reported to Congress represents roughly 38% of the \$18.6 billion allocated for the procurement of military equipment for the ANDSF between 2005 and 2021, according to the August DoD IG report, a total that included military aircraft, aircraft munitions, small arms, and ground vehicles including Humvees, MRAPs, and other tactical vehicles.</p> <p>To be fair, U.S. forces in the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan did their part to render larger pieces of equipment unusable to incoming Taliban militants: their ad-hoc demilitarization efforts "included rendering inoperable 70 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected tactical vehicles and 80 aircraft" the SIGAR report states. "U.S. Air Force personnel assisted in the decommissioning effort, which included clogging fuel lines, removing or destroying high tech equipment, and physically damaging cockpits and avionics."</p>

But the August DoD report made it clear that regardless of what larger military equipment the Taliban managed to tactically acquire (and [continue to operate with severe logistical and maintenance shortfalls](#)), the militants certainly increased their arsenal of small and heavy arms in a significant way.

“Since 2005, the DoD procured 427,300 weapons worth \$612 million for the Afghan military and security forces, including 258,300 rifles, 6,300 sniper rifles, 64,300 pistols, 56,155 machine guns, 31,000 rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and 224 howitzers,” [according](#) to the August DoD IG report. “OUSD(P) noted that 316,260 of these weapons, worth \$511.8 million, were in the Afghan forces’ stocks when the former government fell.”

And while the lack of equipment accountability under the DoD may not be surprising — “since at least 2009, SIGAR and the DoD Office of Inspector General (DOD IG) have published reports noting accountability shortfalls and issues with DoD’s processes for tracking equipment in Afghanistan,” the report states — the cavalier attitude of U.S. officials at the time towards the sudden transfer of weapons certainly was.

“We are always worried about U.S. equipment that could fall into an adversaries’ hands,” then-Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby [said](#) during the fall of Kabul when pressed on the issue. “What actions we might take to prevent that or to forestall it, I just simply won’t speculate about today.”

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HEADLINE	11/17 International troops quit Mali
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/17/troops-quit-mali-violence-moscow-influence
GIST	<p>Thousands of international troops are withdrawing from Mali amid surging violence, growing Russian influence and an acute humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>On Wednesday Germany became the latest country to end its participation in the UN peacekeeping mission in the unstable west African country. Earlier this week, British officials said that 300 British soldiers sent in 2020 to join the United Nations force would be returning earlier than planned.</p> <p>In the decade since they were first deployed, the UN peacekeepers and thousands of French troops have been unable to prevent swathes of Mali falling under the control of an Islamic extremist insurgency linked to groups including al-Qaida and Islamic State.</p> <p>Earlier this month, President Emmanuel Macron announced the formal end of the French deployment.</p> <p>James Heapey, a British defence minister, said that two coups in three years had undermined international efforts to advance peace and that the Malian government was now working with the Russian mercenary group Wagner, which he accused of mass human rights abuses. “The Malian government’s partnership with the Wagner group is counterproductive to lasting stability and security in their region,” Heapey told parliament.</p> <p>Mali’s elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, was toppled in August 2020 by officers angered at the failures to roll back the jihadist insurgency.</p> <p>Last year, the military forced out an interim civilian government and tilted dramatically towards Moscow, concluding an agreement in which about 1,000 fighters from the Kremlin-linked Wagner group have been deployed to bases across much of Mali and which receive Russian weapons.</p> <p>Relations with France, Mali’s former colonial power and traditional ally, deteriorated rapidly after the military takeover, while reports of violence and atrocities against civilians surged.</p> <p>Heapey said the political context made it impossible for the British deployment to continue. “This government cannot deploy our nation’s military to provide security when the host country’s government is not willing to work with us to deliver lasting stability and security,” he told parliament.</p>

“Through ... our wider experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are clear that the military instrument should not be deployed on counterinsurgency or countering violent extremism missions unless there is a clear and compelling commitment towards political progress,” said Heappey.

Bamako has previously denied turning to Wagner’s paramilitaries, acknowledging only the support of Russian military “instructors”. The consequences of the regime’s alignment with Moscow, however, have been very clear, with analysts suggesting the growing obstruction of the UN force is part of a broader strategy.

Heappey said the regime in Bamako had actively sought to interfere with the work of both French-led and UN missions.

German forces have been in Mali since 2013 with a presence of up to 1,400 soldiers as part of the UN mission, and have faced increasing difficulties in recent months. They have repeatedly had to suspend reconnaissance patrols after being denied the right to use drones and other aircraft to safeguard their troops.

Among African countries, Ivory Coast said it is now withdrawing its contingent too. Forty-six soldiers from Ivory Coast were accused of being mercenaries and have been detained for months.

The UN security council renewed its mandate for the UN peacekeepers in Mali for one year on 29 June, although the Malian government opposed requests to allow freedom of movement for rights investigators with the mission.

The operation is one of the UN’s biggest, with 17,557 troops, police, civilians and volunteers deployed. Popular hostility to the force, and to the French, has been intensified by activity on social media. Mali is among several countries targeted in recent years by Russian disinformation and influence operations.

“If the government was looking to Wagner for help in the information war, it can be happy with the results,” said Niagalé Bagayoko, president of the African Security Sector Network. “In the capital and on social media, they have won the opinion war against the west.”

Mali has been facing recurrent jihadist attacks since 2012, part of a broader surge in violence linked to Islamic militancy across the Sahel region, [which has displaced more than 2.5 million people and killed more than 8,000 in 2022](#), according to ACLED, a monitoring group.

Most recently, tens of thousands were forced to flee their villages in Mali during apparent systematic attacks by Islamist armed groups aligned with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The extremists have attacked dozens of villages and massacred scores of civilians in Mali’s vast north-east regions of Ménaka and Gao, which border Niger.

“Islamist armed groups in north-east Mali have carried out terrifying and seemingly coordinated attacks on villages, massacring civilians, looting homes and destroying property,” [said Jehanne Henry, senior Africa adviser at Human Rights Watch](#). “The Malian government needs to do more to protect villagers at particular risk of attack and provide them greater assistance.”

The Wagner paramilitaries and the Malian forces appear unable to effectively combat the insurgents. Both have been accused of systematic human rights abuses, including a series of indiscriminate massacres.

“The people judge by the atrocities committed on civilians,” said Binta Sidibe Gascon, of Kisal, an NGO. “Since Wagner arrived ... we are witnessing an exponential rise in the number of civilian victims.”

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HEADLINE	11/17 US: Afghan govt. to blame in rapid collapse
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221117-afghan-government-to-blame-for-rapid-collapse-u-s-auditor-report

GIST

An official report blames Afghanistan's internationally supported, now-defunct government for failing to recognize that the United States intended to withdraw from the country, one of several factors contributing to its rapid collapse in August 2021 before the Taliban seized power.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which examines the U.S. investment in the conflict-torn nation, produced the report through interviews with current and former American officials as well as experts and former Afghan government officials.

U.S.-backed former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani governed the country through a "highly selective, narrow circle of loyalists," destabilizing the government at a critical juncture, SIGAR found.

The report said the Afghan government's high level of centralization, endemic corruption and struggle to attain legitimacy were long-term contributors to its eventual precipitous collapse.

"The fact that the United States had supported Afghanistan for 20 years and that Afghanistan had been highly dependent on external support for much of its modern history, made it all the harder for Afghan politicians and leaders to envision a future without such support," the report said.

The evaluation noted Washington also failed to resolve the issue of corruption and to achieve its key goal of building stable democratic, representative, gender-sensitive, and accountable Afghan governance institutions.

The report noted the United States had appropriated \$145 billion for the reconstruction of Afghanistan as of June 2021, including \$36.3 billion for governance, social and economic development. However, the government dissolved when Ghani fled the country in the face of the Taliban's rapid takeover and U.S.-led NATO troop withdrawal.

"The rapid disintegration of Afghan security forces and the Ghani administration in August 2021 represented the dramatic conclusion of a two-decade, U.S.-led effort to develop and westernize Afghan society," SIGAR said. "Over nearly 20 years and three U.S. presidencies, the United States had vacillated on the issue of military withdrawal."

The report found that the Afghan government had received "mixed messages" from U.S. policy makers and others in Washington, rendering it unprepared for the foreign troop withdrawal.

The Trump administration's decision to exclude the Ghani administration from peace talks with the Taliban made it "appear weak and abandoned by its primary ally, while bolstering the legitimacy" of the Islamist insurgency.

"U.S. efforts to build and sustain Afghanistan's governing institutions were a total, epic, predestined failure on par with the same efforts and outcome in the Vietnam war, and for the same reasons," Chris Mason, associate professor of national security at the U.S. Army War College, told SIGAR.

The U.S. reconstruction efforts, however, made some progress toward achievement of Afghan governance objectives before the collapse of the government, SIGAR said.

"In both the public and private sectors, the combination of available opportunities and the training and education provided by the United States and its international partners led to increased human capital and institutional capacity. Capacity building was imperfect, but did yield some results," the evaluation said.

It added that "residual elements" of the former Afghan government, including the central bank and ministries of finance as well as health "still exist and are functioning, although their sustainability is uncertain."

Since returning to power 15 months ago, the Taliban have dismantled ministries and departments meant to promote free speech and rights of Afghans, particularly those of women.

	<p>The radical ruling group has enforced its own interpretation of Islam to govern the country.</p> <p>Women have been largely excluded from public life. They are required to cover their faces when in public and undertake long road trips only if accompanied by a male relative. Public parks, baths and gyms are closed to women. Teenage girls are barred from attending secondary schools beyond grade six.</p> <p>SIGAR said it provided a draft of the report to the U.S. Department of State, Department of Defense and U.S. Agency for International Development for review and comment. The watchdog received official written comment from the State Department but the others did not submit any comments, it said.</p> <p>“In communications with the government of then-Afghan President Ghani, high-level officials in the Biden administration made clear that the United States was preparing for a full withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan,” the report quoted the State Department as telling SIGAR in a written reply.</p> <p>The letter stressed that “the standard by which the U.S. government succeeded or failed in its political objectives needs to be wholly reconsidered in this report.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Canadian charged w/terrorism for Haiti plot
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/17/quebec-man-charged-canada-haiti-plot-government
GIST	<p>Canadian police have charged a Quebec man with terrorism over allegations he conspired to overthrow the government of the late Haitian president Jovenel Moïse, who was later assassinated in a separate plot.</p> <p>Gerald Nicolas, 51, stands accused of leaving Canada to facilitate a terrorist activity, facilitating a terrorist activity and providing property for terrorist purposes, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said on Thursday.</p> <p>The federal force said that the investigation was not related to Moïse’s assassination in 2021, when a team of Colombian mercenaries attacked his residence in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince.</p> <p>Instead, police say the charges stem from an investigation that began after the local police service in the city of Lévis, outside Quebec City, contacted federal police.</p> <p>“What is alleged ... is that Mr Nicolas actually travelled to Haiti and to other Central and South American countries – we’re talking about multiple countries – in order to recruit, finance and acquire some weapons for his armed revolution,” Sgt Charles Poirier, an RCMP spokesperson, told the Canadian Press.</p> <p>“He not only wanted to overthrow the government in place, but also seize power.”</p> <p>Nicolas and his co-conspirators were unsuccessful in acquiring weapons, police said.</p> <p>Nicolas told CBC Radio on Thursday that the charges were untrue, and claimed that they were the result of lies spread by a former lover, who contacted police in Lévis after he sent humanitarian aid, including food and clothing, to Haiti, where his half-sister lives.</p> <p>“She made up a whole story that I was a terrorist,” he said, alleging that the woman told police the shipment contained illegal materials.</p> <p>“She managed to convince [police] because I’m Black. If I were white, I wouldn’t be talking to you today. The police would have been more careful,” he said “The Lévis police are racists with a badge.”</p> <p>Poirier said he hoped the “serious” charges against Nicolas would serve as a warning to others.</p>

	<p>“If you are a Canadian citizen, breaking the law in a foreign country is the same as breaking the law in Canada.”</p> <p>Nicolas is due to appear at the Quebec City courthouse on 1 December to face three terrorism-related charges.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Taliban: strict interpretation Sharia law
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-taliban-sharia-rcna57816
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban will stick to their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, a spokesman said Thursday, underscoring the group’s intention to continue hard-line policies implemented since they took over Afghanistan more than a year ago.</p> <p>During their previous years in power in the late 1990s, the Taliban carried out public executions, floggings and stoning of those convicted of crimes in Taliban courts.</p> <p>After they overran Afghanistan in August 2021 as American and NATO forces were in the last weeks of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war, the Taliban initially promised to be more moderate and allow for women’s and minority rights.</p> <p>Instead, they have cracked down heavier on rights and freedoms.</p> <p>Women are banned from parks, funfairs, gyms and most forms of employment. They are ordered to cover themselves from head to toe. Girls are forbidden from going to school beyond sixth grade. There are also clampdowns on music and the media.</p> <p>According to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, the group’s supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhunzada, met with Taliban judges a few days ago and instructed them to implement Sharia law in their rulings.</p> <p>Mujahid said this instruction prompted perceptions that Islamic law had been abandoned in the Islamic emirate, as the Taliban call their administration. But that is not the case, he added.</p> <p>“It doesn’t mean that the Islamic emirate didn’t implement the limits of Allah Almighty since it came to power,” he said. “Rather, the Islamic emirate is committed to implementing all Sharia laws from day one.”</p> <p>Videos and photos of Taliban fighters punishing people for various offenses have frequently appeared on social media in the last 15 months, although officials have never confirmed these incidents.</p> <p>The former insurgents have struggled in their transition from insurgency and warfare to governing amid an economic downturn and the international community’s withholding of official recognition.</p> <p>The United Nations has said it is increasingly concerned that restrictions on girls’ education, as well as other measures curtailing basic freedoms, will deepen Afghanistan’s economic crisis and lead to greater insecurity, poverty and isolation.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Turkey: 17 charged for Istanbul bombing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/turkey-17-charged-bombing-istanbul-killed-93542660
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL -- A Turkish court has ordered 17 suspects jailed pending trial in connection with a deadly street bombing in Istanbul, accusing them of attempts against the unity of the state, deliberate killings and attempts to kill, Turkey’s state-run news agency reported Friday.</p> <p>The court released three other suspects from custody pending trial, Anadolu Agency reported. It also ordered the deportation from Turkey of 29 people who were rounded up by police in connection with the attack.</p>

The Nov. 13 explosion targeted Istanbul's bustling Istiklal Avenue — a popular thoroughfare lined with shops and restaurants — and left six people dead, including two children. More than 80 others were wounded.

The attack came as a shocking reminder of bombings that hit Turkish cities between 2015 and 2017, shattering the public's sense of security.

Turkish authorities blamed last weekend's explosion on the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, as well as Syrian Kurdish groups affiliated with it. The Kurdish militants groups have denied involvement.

Prosecutors questioned the main suspect in the attack, a Syrian woman who is accused of leaving a TNT-laden bomb on Istiklal Avenue, for some five hours.

The woman, identified as Ahlam Albashir, allegedly told her interrogators that she had entered Turkey illegally and stayed at a house in Istanbul for four months, pretending to be a couple with one of the other suspects, the Anadolu Agency reported.

According to the news agency, Albashir also allegedly admitted to leaving a bag containing the explosive device on a street bench but claimed she did not know what was inside it.

A trial date is expected to be set after prosecutors prepare their indictment, which could take months.

One suspect was apprehended by Turkish police late Wednesday in the Syrian city of Azaz - which is currently under the control of the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition - and was being questioned by police.

There was no information on the 29 people who face deportation.

The PKK has fought an armed insurgency in Turkey since 1984. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since then.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Taking stock: domestic violent extremism
SOURCE	https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2022-november-17/
GIST	<p>Bottom Line Up Front</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• While the U.S. avoided political violence surrounding last week's midterm elections, there is still growing concern over the domestic violent extremist landscape, with threats more diverse than at any point in recent memory.• Domestic terrorism in the United States has been on the rise the past several years, including a major spike in violent incidents at demonstrations and protests in cities and urban areas.• High-profile attacks in 2022 have spanned the ideological spectrum, demonstrating just how complex and unpredictable the state of domestic violent extremism is in the United States currently.• Looking ahead, U.S. law enforcement and counterterrorism authorities remain concerned about the radicalizing impact of conspiracies and disinformation, particularly in the area of anti-government and anti-authority violent extremism. <p>While the United States avoided political violence surrounding last week's midterm elections, there is still growing concern over the domestic violent extremist (DVE) landscape, with threats more diverse than at any point in recent memory. Last month, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published an unclassified report, "Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism," prepared for several Congressional committees, including the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. The U.S. government analyzes the DVE threat through five separate categories, including (1) racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE); (2) anti-government or anti-authority violent extremism (AGAAVE), which includes a) anarchist violent extremists b) militia violent extremists and c) sovereign citizen violent extremists; (3) animal</p>

rights/environmental violent extremism; (4) abortion-related violent extremism; and (5) “all other domestic terrorism threats,” which includes “political and/or social agendas which are not otherwise exclusively defined under one of the other threat categories.”

Domestic terrorism in the United States has been on the rise the past several years. According to a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), there has been an increase in both the number and percentage of domestic terrorist incidents at demonstrations in cities in both 2020 and 2021, with those years accounting for a 47 percent and 51 percent rise in attacks at demonstrations, respectively. CSIS data also showed an increase in the overall percentage of attacks and plots by the far-left last year (40 percent in 2021, up from 23 percent in 2020), although far-right extremists, including white supremacists and anti-government militias, still accounted for the highest percentage of plots and attacks, at 49 percent. Anti-Semitism and hate crimes against [Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders \(AAPI\)](#) have also been on the rise, with prominent voices in music and sports [lending their voices](#) to anti-Semitic tropes and narratives. Many of these trends have been exacerbated over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of 2020, the FBI was conducting approximately 1,400 pending domestic terrorism investigations, a number that nearly doubled in 2021 to 2,700 investigations, a significant portion of which were related to the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. At the end of 2021, the FBI domestic terrorism investigations were focused on anti-government or anti-authority violent extremism (38 percent), anti-riot laws/civil unrest (31 percent), and racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (19 percent). Only 1 percent of investigations were focused on animal rights/environmental violent extremism, with the remaining 11 percent focused on [“all other domestic terrorism threats.”](#) Abortion-related violent extremism garnered 0 percent of investigations at the end of 2021, though given the overturning of [Roe v. Wade](#), that number is expected to rise and could do so significantly.

The data is incomplete for 2022, but one thing remains clear, the terrorist threat in the United States is driven by a complex patchwork of ideologies, grievances, and motivations. High-profile attacks in 2022 have spanned the ideological spectrum. In January, a [hostage situation](#) at a synagogue in Colleyville, TX was inspired by a lone actor’s attempt to secure the release of a federally convicted female supporter of al-Qaeda. In May, [a far-right extremist](#) motivated by racist, anti-Black, and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories attacked a supermarket in Buffalo, NY, where he murdered 10 innocent civilians in cold blood. That same month, an individual attacked a church in California that served the Taiwanese community, killing one and injuring five others while also placing Molotov cocktail-style devices around the church. There have also been devastating, high-profile attacks—a shooting on a Brooklyn, NY subway in April 2022 and a shooting at a 4th of July parade in Highland Park, IL—which cannot be clearly labelled terrorism, given unclear motives and incoherent social media footprints. In one week in August in the United States, four Muslim-Americans were targeted and murdered in an anti-Shia motivated attack, a far-right extremist attacked an [FBI office](#) in Cincinnati, Ohio, and famous author Salman Rushdie was stabbed by an American citizen who was inspired by the Iranian regime and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). What used to be a fairly consistent and homogenous threat from Sunni jihadists, has given way to a variegated attack matrix, the most defining feature of which is the broad range of ideologies motivating violence.

Looking ahead, U.S. law enforcement and counterterrorism authorities remain concerned about the radicalizing impact of conspiracies and disinformation, particularly in the area of anti-government and anti-authority violent extremism. There are also several hot-button political and public policy issues that could serve as drivers for acts of violence, including [nativism](#) and immigration, abortion, and gun control. U.S. adversaries—including China, Russia, and Iran, among others—continue to maintain an interest in [amplifying divisive narratives](#) and incendiary rhetoric in an attempt to contribute directly to discord within the United States. Russian disinformation campaigns have sought to spread conspiracies about bioweapons and other false narratives, in an effort to inspire calls for violence against U.S. officials and institutions.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Night shift takes toll on workers
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/18/us-workers-night-shift-takes-toll
GIST	<p>Roger Reinhardt works third shift at a beer production facility in Michigan from 10pm-8am, four days a week. He initially started working nights because it was the only shift available when he started working but he has continued doing it for the extra pay.</p> <p>But is not easy.</p> <p>“It all comes down to sleep. Blackout curtains, white noise and melatonin supplements only do so much. The body rebels. When I’m not going great, I wake up every 90 minutes to two hours and might go through most days of the week with only four hours of sleep,” said Reinhardt. “The shift is killing us all slowly.”</p> <p>He noted the shift has a lot of employee turnover because of people either not capable or willing to sacrifice daylight hours for the sleep they need, and needing to sleep during the day makes social events, chores, and errands a lot more difficult.</p> <p>“Almost universally across the board, the job is taken because the worker either didn’t have another job available to them or they needed the money, or both,” added Reinhardt.</p> <p>Millions of workers in the US work throughout the night, from workers in emergency services, such as paramedics, nurses, police officers, to late night hospitality, retail and food service workers, transportation and utility workers, and workers in factories and warehouses producing or distributing goods 24 hours a day.</p> <p>The majority of US workers are on the job during the day, on 9am-5pm schedules or a few hours before or after, But about 5 to 10% are on their job through late night hours, with a portion of regularly working night shifts to workers with rotating night shift schedules.</p> <p>The impacts of these late night work schedules can be profound on the health of workers and their ability to balance a life outside of work.</p> <p>An Amazon worker in Washington who requested to remain anonymous has been working part-time on the overnight shift, Monday through Friday from 9.45pm and gets off around 2 to 2.30am. She has done it for about a year, because it enables her to avoid the cost of childcare and she gets time to spend with her children.</p> <p>“It can get very exhausting since you’re not getting the adequate amount of sleep you need as a healthy adult. I only get four hours of sleep every night and try to sneak in a nap during the day. Some days I feel like I’m in a daze,” she said. “I do get paid \$1.50 extra an hour so basically you’ll only make six dollars extra for that shift.”</p> <p>Humans have a 24-hour circadian timing system, a biological clock, affecting physiological processes such as sleep patterns, eating habits and digestion, hormones, blood pressure and body temperature.</p> <p>“It evolved to help organisms cope with the daily changes in their environment. Our body is exposed to very different conditions during the day and the night: during the day we normally eat, we move, and we’re alert, while during the night we sleep, we rest, and we recover,” said Dr Laura Kervezee, a chronobiologist at Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands.</p> <p>“Night shift work turns it upside down. It leads people to be awake and consume food at times that their physiology is primed for sleep and rest. This leads to what we call circadian misalignment, where behavior becomes uncoupled with the circadian rhythms in the body.”</p>

Numerous studies have demonstrated increased health risks for night shift workers in the long term, as their work schedules misalign their circadian timing systems, including higher risks of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, cancer, depression, and short term impacts such as decreased cognitive performance, fatigue, and sleep deprivation.

“As a society, we should really think about whether that’s really where we want to go, to expose people to an extra health risk just because we want our package to arrive faster,” added Dr Kervezee, noting there is still research needed to be done to pinpoint the link between the short-term acute effects and the long-term health problems that night shift workers experience.

A warehouse worker on the third shift at UPS in Kentucky who requested to remain anonymous, explained the mental and physical drain the shift has had on them. They work from 10pm to 4am or later, receiving a higher hourly wage for working the third shift.

“Working third shift is really hard. It’s very mentally draining and people around you tend to be grumpier to work around, because everyone would rather be in bed,” they said.

They explained getting adequate sleep is difficult because of the noise and light during the day and they rarely have the time or energy to spend time with family or friends on work days.

Kennedy Sparr works the night shift as a 911 emergency dispatcher in Michigan, working from 6pm to 6am, often more than 40 hours a week. It’s not uncommon for her to be up 36 hours at a time before sleeping.

“It’s definitely harder to train your body to work the night shift, because your body is not used to staying up all night,” said Sparr. “I noticed at the times that I work night shifts, you’re more edgy, you have more of an attitude, you’re angry, you’re tired, you’re exhausted, and you feel drained.”

She explained that she often doesn’t sleep enough and the night shift schedule makes it difficult to maintain relationships with everyone else on normal schedules, and then adapting and retraining your body between day schedules on days off and vacations to going back to work nights.

“I don’t think there are ever nights that I feel fully refreshed when I come back to work, because I’ve had four hours of sleep and nothing’s done at home. I need to do things like laundry, I need to do the dishes. But I just wanted to sleep.”

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HEADLINE	11/17 Plan: largest dam demolition in US history
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/us-regulators-to-vote-on-largest-dam-demolition-in-history/
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — U.S. regulators approved a plan Thursday to demolish four dams on a California river and open up hundreds of miles of salmon habitat that would be the largest dam removal and river restoration project in the world when it goes forward.</p> <p>The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s unanimous vote on the lower Klamath River dams is the last major regulatory hurdle and the biggest milestone for a \$500 million demolition proposal championed by Native American tribes and environmentalists for years. The project would return the lower half of California’s second-largest river to a free-flowing state for the first time in more than a century.</p> <p>Native tribes that rely on the Klamath River and its salmon for their way of life have been a driving force behind bringing the dams down in a wild and remote area that spans the California and Oregon border. Barring any unforeseen complications, Oregon, California and the entity formed to oversee the project will accept the license transfer and could begin dam removal as early as this summer, proponents said.</p>

“The Klamath salmon are coming home,” Yurok Chairman Joseph James said after the vote. “The people have earned this victory and with it, we carry on our sacred duty to the fish that have sustained our people since the beginning of time.”

The dams produce less than 2% of PacifiCorp’s power generation — enough to power about 70,000 homes — when they are running at full capacity, said Bob Gravely, spokesperson for the utility. But they often run at a far lower capacity because of low water in the river and other issues, and the agreement that paved the way for Thursday’s vote was ultimately a business decision, he said.

PacifiCorp would have had to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in fish ladders, fish screens and other conservation upgrades under environmental regulations that were not in place when the aging dams were first built. But with the deal approved Thursday, the utility’s cost is capped at \$200 million, with another \$250 million from a California voter-approved water bond.

“We’re closing coal plants and building wind farms and it all just has to add up in the end. It’s not a one-to-one,” he said of the coming dam demolition. “You can make up that power by the way you operate the rest of your facilities or having energy efficiency savings so your customers are using less.”

Approval of the order to surrender the dams’ operating license is the bedrock of the most ambitious salmon restoration plan in history and the project’s scope — measured by the number of dams and the amount of river habitat that would reopen to salmon — makes it the largest of its kind in the world, said Amy Souers Kober, spokesperson for American Rivers, which monitors dam removals and advocates for river restoration.

More than 300 miles (483 kilometers) of salmon habitat in the Klamath River and its tributaries would benefit, she said.

The decision is in line with a trend toward removing aging and outdated dams across the U.S. as they come up for license renewal and confront the same government-mandated upgrade costs as the Klamath River dams would have had.

Across the U.S., 1,951 dams have been demolished as of February, including 57 in 2021, American Rivers said. Most of those have come down in the past 25 years as facilities age and come up for relicensing.

Commissioners on Thursday called the decision “momentous” and “historic” and spoke of the importance of taking the action during National Native American Heritage Month because of its importance to restoring salmon and reviving the river that is at the heart of the culture of several tribes in the region.

“Some people might ask in this time of great need for zero emissions, ‘Why are we removing the dams?’ First, we have to understand this doesn’t happen every day ... a lot of these projects were licensed a number of years back when there wasn’t as much focus on environmental issues,” said FERC Chairman Richard Glick. “Some of these projects have a significant impact on the environment and a significant impact on fish.”

Glick added that, in the past, the commission did not consider the effect of energy projects on tribes but said that was a “very important element” of Thursday’s decision.

Members of the Yurok, Karuk and Hoopa Valley tribes and other supporters lit a bonfire and watched the vote on a remote Klamath River sandbar via a satellite uplink to symbolize their hopes for the river’s renewal.

“I understand that some of those tribes are watching this meeting today on the (river) bar and I raise a toast to you,” Commissioner Willie Phillips said.

The vote comes at a critical moment when human-caused climate change is hammering the Western United States with prolonged drought, said Tom Kiernan, president of American Rivers. He said allowing

	<p>California’s second-largest river to flow naturally, and its flood plains and wetlands to function normally, would mitigate those impacts.</p> <p>“The best way of managing increasing floods and droughts is to allow the river system to be healthy and do its thing,” he said.</p> <p>The Klamath Basin watershed covers more than 14,500 square miles (37,500 square kilometers) and the Klamath itself was once the third-largest salmon producing river on the West Coast. But the dams, constructed between 1918 and 1962, essentially cut the river in half and prevent salmon from reaching spawning grounds upstream. Consequently, salmon runs have been dwindling for years.</p> <p>The smallest dam, Copco 2, could come down as early as this summer. The remaining dams — one in southern Oregon and two in California — will be drained down very slowly starting in early 2024 with the goal of returning the river to its natural state by the end of that year.</p> <p>Plans to remove the dams have not been without controversy.</p> <p>Homeowners on Copco Lake, a large reservoir, vigorously oppose the demolition plan and rate payers in the rural counties around the dams worry about taxpayers shouldering the cost of any overruns or liability problems. Critics also believe dam removal won’t be enough to save the salmon because of changing ocean conditions the fish encounter before the return to their natal river.</p> <p>“The whole question is, will this add to the increased production of salmon? It has everything to do with what’s going on in the ocean (and) we think this will turn out to be a futile effort,” said Richard Marshall, head of the Siskiyou County Water Users Association. “Nobody’s ever tried to take care of the problem by taking care of the existing situation without just removing the dams.”</p> <p>U.S. regulators raised flags about the potential for cost overruns and liability issues in 2020, nearly killing the proposal, but Oregon, California and PacifiCorp, which operates the hydroelectric dams and is owned by billionaire Warren Buffett’s company Berkshire Hathaway, teamed up to add another \$50 million in contingency funds.</p> <p>PacifiCorp will continue to operate the dams until the demolition begins.</p> <p>The largest U.S. dam demolition to date is the removal of two dams on the Elwha River on Washington’s Olympic Peninsula in 2012.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Sweden: traces of explosive at pipelines
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/18/business/nord-stream-explosive-traces-sweden-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Investigators have found traces of explosives at the site of the damaged Nord Stream pipelines, confirming that sabotage had taken place, a Swedish prosecutor said on Friday.</p> <p>Swedish and Danish authorities are investigating four holes in the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines which link Russia and Germany via the Baltic Sea and have become a flashpoint in the Ukraine crisis.</p> <p>Denmark last month said a preliminary investigation had shown that the leaks were caused by powerful explosions.</p> <p>“Analysis that has now been carried out shows traces of explosives on several of the objects that were recovered,” the Swedish Prosecution Authority said in a statement.</p> <p>“The investigation is highly complex and comprehensive. The ongoing probe will determine whether any suspects can be identified,” it added.</p>

	The prosecutor's office declined to give further comment.
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HEADLINE	11/17 Arizona community faces loss of water
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/faucets-poised-run-dry-hundreds-arizona-residents-years-end-rcna57550
GIST	<p>RIO VERDE FOOTHILLS, Ariz. — More than 500 homes in this affluent desert community that boasts mountain views, ample trees and ranches hidden in the crooks of scrubby hills will run out of water by year's end as drought tightens its grip on the West.</p> <p>Residents of Rio Verde Foothills outside Scottsdale have tried for years to resolve the looming crisis to no avail as the deadline to stop their water deliveries draws closer, forcing individual homeowners to find their own sources of water for drinking, bathing, washing dishes or doing their laundry.</p> <p>“It’s going to be really ugly and terrible for our homeowners and landowners,” said Karen Nabity, who has lived in Rio Verde Foothills for seven years. “Some of us will borrow water from a friend’s well, others will have to pay a water hauler from far away.”</p> <p>As climate change makes the Western United States hotter and drier, the looming crisis in Rio Verde Foothills exemplifies how cities and states could be forced to vie for a diminishing amount of the natural resource.</p> <p>The rural community of about 2,200 homes in unincorporated Maricopa County does not have its own water system, and most residents get their water from private wells on their properties. But more than 500 homeowners rely strictly on truck haulers to deliver water from a standpipe in Scottsdale. Another 200 whose wells are running dry periodically use the water haulers, as well, residents say.</p> <p>But a year ago, Scottsdale notified Rio Verde homeowners that its water supply would be limited to city residents only starting Jan. 1, 2023, barring trucking companies from purchasing and exporting its water.</p> <p>The notice came nearly a decade after Scottsdale first asked Rio Verde residents to search for an alternative water source, city officials said.</p> <p>Scottsdale Water, the municipal utility, said the decision was one element of a larger contingency plan by the Central Arizona Project, which delivers water from the Colorado River to central and southern Arizona, to reduce its consumption. Scottsdale residents also were urged to reduce their usage as a first step toward more stringent restrictions.</p> <p>The contingency plan was activated after the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which oversees Colorado River operations, declared a "Tier 1" shortage in August 2021 for the first time. The declaration reduces the amount of water Arizona, Nevada and Mexico can get from the river, which supplies water to about 40 million people in the Western U.S. The tier goes up as river levels go down, with Tier 3 being the most severe.</p> <p>Some Rio Verde Foothills residents said they don't know how such an important issue could have dragged on so long without a resolution.</p> <p>“It’s a priority because why wouldn’t we want to solve this problem,” said Jennifer Simpson, who was drawn to Rio Verde Foothills 23 years ago by its wide-open spaces.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Australia FM: Putin 'harboring murderers'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/nov/18/penny-wong-accuses-vladimir-putin-of-harboring-murderers-after-mh17-verdict
GIST	<p>Penny Wong has accused the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, of “harbouring murderers”, warning that the world will not forget a court verdict that Russia and two of its nationals were responsible for the downing of MH17.</p> <p>The Australian foreign minister made the remarks on Friday after a Dutch court found Russians Igor Girkin and Sergey Dubinskiy and Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko guilty of bringing down the plane and the murder of everyone onboard.</p> <p>Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down by a Russian surface-to-air missile when it was flying over eastern Ukraine in 2014, killing 298 people, among them 38 Australians.</p> <p>On Friday Wong said the court verdict had delivered “the truth”.</p> <p>“I want to say first to all of the families and friends that we know that you suffered an unfathomable grief. We know you’ve waited a long time for justice,” Wong told Radio National.</p> <p>“These verdicts matter because they confirm the truth: that these men were responsible for downing a civilian aircraft and it also confirms the involvement of the Russian Federation ... [that the] separatists had direction from Russia; Russia supplied training, weapons and money.</p> <p>“So whilst I know that very little can lessen the grief when you lose a loved one in such horrific circumstances, it is important for the truth to [come] out – and it has.”</p> <p>On the question of whether Russia might ever hand the men over, Wong said: “We would say to Russia, the world knows that you’re harbouring murderers and that says something about you, Mr Putin.”</p> <p>Wong said the world knows the three men “murdered 298 people” and they will “remain on the Interpol list and nothing will ever remove that sentence, which stands as an indictment on them and those that supported and funded them”.</p> <p>The foreign minister said Australia will continue to put pressure on Russia and work with the international community to “hold Russia to account for all of its actions”.</p> <p>“Obviously we would wish the world to be different from that which it is – but look at the response to [the invasion of] Ukraine ... and the pressure Russia has felt – that is important.</p> <p>“We want Russia to act differently, but until it does, what we have to do is maintain that collective response to Russia’s abrogation of international law.”</p> <p>Julie Bishop, Australia’s foreign minister at the time of MH17’s downing, told Sky News after the guilty verdict that Russia “must admit responsibility for this heinous crime”.</p> <p>“Russia cannot continue to hide behind lies and obfuscation – they’ve obstructed this investigation at every step of the way,” she said.</p> <p>Bishop said it was now clear that Russia “had already invaded Ukraine in 2014 – it just lied about it”, but the findings about the shooting down of MH17 “laid bare that lie”.</p> <p>“They weren’t Ukrainian farmers who were able to deploy surface-to-air missile and shoot down commercial flight at 33,000ft.”</p> <p>Girkin, Dubinskiy and Kharchenko were ordered to pay “more than €16m” (A\$25m) in compensation to the victims. The three men remain at large and it is unclear if they will ever serve their sentences.</p>

	<p>A third Russian national, Oleg Pulatov, was acquitted of the charges owing to lack of evidence about his role in the firing of the missile.</p> <p>In 2014, all four were fighters for the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, a pro-Russia separatist movement. None of the men appeared in court and only Pulatov chose to appoint lawyers, who pleaded not guilty on his behalf.</p> <p>Prosecutors and the suspects have two weeks to appeal against the court's decisions.</p> <p>The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said it was an important court decision, tweeting: "Holding to account masterminds is crucial too, as the feeling of impunity leads to new crimes. We must dispel this illusion. Punishment for all [Russia's] atrocities then & now is inevitable."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Target: retail theft is \$400M Q3 loss in profit
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/nov/17/retail-theft-known-as-shrink-responsible-for-400-m/
GIST	<p>Target took a \$400 million loss year-over-year in the third quarter due to "organized retail crime," executives said on the company's earnings call Wednesday.</p> <p>"We're facing a growing financial headwind from shortage, which is running hundreds of millions of dollars higher than a year ago," Target CEO Brian Cornell said on the call. "Along with other retailers, we've seen a significant increase in theft and organized retail crime across our business. As a result, we're making significant investments in training and technology that can deter that."</p> <p>Known in the industry as "shrink," in the industry, organized retail theft and individual shoplifting cost Target hundreds of millions in profits compared with the third quarter of 2021.</p> <p>"At Target year-to-date, incremental shortage has already reduced our gross margin by more than \$400 million versus last year, and we expect it will reduce our gross margin by more than \$600 million for the full year," said Target Chief Financial Officer Michael Fiddelke.</p> <p>Mr. Fiddelke said Target, along with other industry stakeholders, supports legislation that would impede the sale of stolen merchandise online.</p> <p>Target executives did not single out any particular jurisdictions as being heavy on crime, noting instead that the overall problem has grown nationwide.</p> <p>"This is primarily driven by organized crime. And so there is a role for us to work as a retail group with law enforcement with the government to help find solutions," said Target Chief Operating Officer John Mulligan.</p> <p>Shrink has impacted retailers nationwide. In the National Retail Federation's 2022 National Retail Security Survey, respondents indicated that 37% of inventory shortages in fiscal year 2021 could be attributed to external theft, including organized retail crime.</p> <p>The retailers, unlike Target, did pinpoint organized retail crime to a series of localized geographies.</p> <p>The survey respondents indicated that the top 10 metropolitan areas for organized retail crime in FY 2021 were, in order: Los Angeles, San Francisco/Oakland, New York, Houston, Miami, Chicago, Sacramento, Seattle, Atlanta, and Dallas-Fort Worth.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 FBI: Covid shutdowns fueled juvenile crime
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/nov/17/fbi-director-wray-blames-covid-school-shutdowns-fu/

FBI Director Christopher A. Wray said Thursday that children who were shut out of schools during the pandemic and who have yet to go back to the classroom are factors in America's "violent crime crisis."

He said juveniles have added to the brew of drugs, gangs and illegal guns that are fueling the crime spree.

"We are seeing, and I hear this from chiefs and sheriffs all the time, as well as our own agents, an alarming uptick in the incidence of juveniles engaging in violence, often graduating from carjackings to even worse violence," Mr. Wray said. "This is a real challenge for the legal system because we're not set up to very effectively deal with crimes committed by minors."

Part of that, he said, is "juveniles who post-COVID have not returned to school."

"That may contribute to the juvenile effect," he said in testimony to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

He made the revelations in response to a question by Sen. Jon Ossoff, Georgia Democrat, who wanted to know what was behind the rise in violent crime in his state and elsewhere.

In addition to the juveniles, Mr. Wray said criminals are slipping through holes either because of backlogs or intentional policies such as prosecutorial discretion or "bail practices."

"There are too many criminals that are being released back onto the streets," he said, but the trend isn't universal.

He didn't name the communities affected, though analysts have tied New York's focus on bail reforms to a surge in criminal reoffenses.

Even behind bars, he said, some criminals gain access to cellphones to orchestrate violence.

Analysts debate the levels of crime, and confusing reporting of data to the FBI has hindered attempts to get a clear picture.

Americans viscerally report heightened fear of crime, and streets in some cities are clearly worse. The Major Cities Chiefs Association said homicide and rape rates have dipped in 2022 but violent crime overall — powered by robberies and assaults — is up in 70 cities surveyed.

The violent crime rate among juveniles was dropping before the pandemic, according to Justice Department data. The rate had steadily decreased since the mid-1990s, when youth arrests on violent crime charges topped 140,000. In 2020, the number was less than 40,000.

The drop has been consistent across all categories of crime, including homicide, rape, aggravated assault and robbery.

But those who track the issue say youth crime rates rose with the pandemic, and with more gentle approaches to offenders.

In the District of Columbia, police reported 63 juveniles arrested for carjacking as of early September. That was well ahead of 2019's total of 25, and on pace to break 2021's record of 100 youth carjacking arrests.

In Prince George's County, Maryland, which borders the district, police had arrested 430 juveniles as of early September. That was more than double last year's rate.

Some communities responded with curfews to try to control who was out on the streets, though Justice Department data indicates crime during the afternoon, including school hours, is more common than nighttime offenses.

Mr. Wray said the FBI has taken on new roles but still devotes more personnel to tackling violent crime than any other single issue.

“Day in, day out, the FBI that most Americans and certainly most law enforcement professionals ... experience most is really more focused on the traditional criminal stuff,” he said.

He said the press focuses on national security, espionage and cybercrimes cases, but that doesn’t capture the full picture of activity at the bureau.

He said the FBI tallied more than 50 violent crime arrests a day over the summer.

It was the bureau’s other activities that drew fire from some Republicans on Thursday.

Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican, demanded to know whether the FBI is using tactics to circumvent the law’s prohibition on obtaining records of Americans’ social media activities.

Mr. Wray said the bureau is operating within the law, but he didn’t directly answer Mr. Paul’s inquiry.

Sen. Ron Johnson, Wisconsin Republican, prodded Mr. Wray over the senator’s claim that the FBI “set me up” by arranging a suspicious briefing in 2020 where he was told he might be a target for Russian disinformation. The briefing’s contents were leaked in 2021.

“Why won’t you tell us who directed that briefing?” Mr. Johnson demanded.

The leaked information became a campaign issue when Mr. Johnson’s Democratic opponent cited it this year. Mr. Johnson won reelection.

“Somebody leaked that FBI briefing,” he said. “That is election interference.”

Mr. Wray said he couldn’t identify a person who arranged the “defensive” briefing but said he would offer a new briefing explaining how the briefing system works.

Sen. Josh Hawley, Missouri Republican, ticked off a litany of problems he saw at the FBI and asked Mr. Wray: “Do you think you are still up to this job?”

“I absolutely think I’m still up to this job, and I think our workforce feels the same way,” Mr. Wray said.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Redmond PD: 11yr cold case murder arrest
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/redmond-police-make-arrest-in-11-year-cold-case-of-missing-woman
GIST	<p>REDMOND, Wash. - Redmond Police arrested a suspect in the disappearance of a woman in 2011.</p> <p>On Wednesday, authorities arrested 44-year-old Mark Raymond Frisby and charged him with second-degree murder of Lorill Sinclair, who went missing on Nov. 8, 2011.</p> <p>Sinclair was last seen that day near Factoria Mall in Bellevue, and her vehicle was later found in a church parking lot by Frisby’s apartment.</p> <p>The two were dating at the time, and she was visiting him before her disappearance.</p> <p>On Dec. 10, 2011, some 70 Search & Rescue volunteers conducted a search around Coal Creek Parkway and Factoria Blvd, but found no evidence. There has been no signs of activity or communication with her since.</p> <p>To this day, authorities say her remains have not been found.</p>

	<p>The case went cold for years, but Redmond Police reopened it in 2021—on the 10th anniversary of her disappearance.</p> <p>New investigations, search warrants and advancements in DNA technology led authorities to gather enough evidence to identify Frisby as the suspect. Frisby was arrested by LAPD officers at his Los Angeles apartment.</p> <p>He is currently in jail awaiting extradition to King County.</p> <p>"We never forgot Lorill and are grateful to have identified the person responsible for her tragic murder," said Police Chief Darrell Lowe. "We hope this arrest can provide her family some closure."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Spokane car break-ins growing problem
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/money/economy/boomtown-inland-northwest/spokane-car-thefts-boomtown/293-678cf782-05ed-4053-97ab-582c72ecffe8
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Keeping your car from being stolen or broken into in Spokane is a growing problem. Just ask Chef Michael Owens at the People’s Waffle downtown.</p> <p>“I’ve had a couple times actually, a couple different occasions, where my back window has been busted out,” said Owens.</p> <p>Owens says his car windows have been smashed three times while being parked downtown, even though he parks just feet away from the entrance.</p> <p>“I’d say probably about 80% of our staff here has experienced it,” says Owens. “Or there’s days where I’ve come in, and there’s been four or five cars where you just see the windows just completely busted out.”</p> <p>Even parking in a high-traffic area like 1st Avenue doesn’t make him feel any safer.</p> <p>“I definitely like am checking it every once in a while, just making sure my car is okay,” said Owens.</p> <p>According to Spokane Police, the downtown area has seen the biggest increase in property crimes and some of the highest numbers of vehicle-related crimes, but Corporal Nick Briggs says other neighborhoods are seeing similar trends.</p> <p>....map that we created based on the data provided to us by the Spokane Police Department and their crime map.</p> <p>The interactive map is based on the total number of thefts from a motor vehicle reported to the Spokane Police Department from January 2021 through October 2022. The city is split by police district and highlighted green, yellow, or red for low, medium, or high number of reports, respectively.</p> <p>The colors were determined by how far each district’s reports were from the median number of reports. To see the number of reported thefts and district names hover over each district.</p> <p>From January through October of this year, 3538 vehicles had been broken into in Spokane. That’s up by nearly a thousand incidents from this time last year.</p> <p>“We’ve seen increases in property crime we’ve also seen increases, to a lesser extent in violent crime,” said Cpl. Briggs. “And so we’ve had to move some resources because protecting people’s physical well-being has to be our number one priority.”</p>

	<p>Corporal Briggs says even though people are calling to report these crimes, police are not able to respond to all of them in person.</p> <p>“Generally, when it comes to a vehicle prowling incident, an officer will not respond, an officer in person will not respond,” said Cpl. Briggs. “That doesn't mean that there's not still a police report, those police reports are taken through our crime check system, it also doesn't mean that they won't be investigated.”</p> <p>Break-ins are also harder to respond to because they happen so quickly and often, no one is around to witness what happened.</p> <p>“Because that crime takes such a small amount of time, it's obviously hard for us to deter in some instances because there's such a short window that we would actually be seeing it,” said Cpl. Briggs. “And it happened so quickly. And there's no really residual evidence that's readily apparent. So you know, somebody takes a backpack out of a car, and the two seconds that they're in the car, they're actually committing the crime, now they've got the backpack, they're walking down the street, there's nothing super evident, then they've just committed a crime, right? They blend right back in.”</p> <p>Corporal Briggs says that the age-old rules still apply to protecting your car from thieves. Park in a well-lit area. Don't leave valuables in your car. And lock your doors. However, he also says to keep detailed information and serial numbers of any valuable items.</p> <p>“So, documents with serial numbers,” said Cpl. Briggs. “I always recommend people keep a file of all their valuable items with pictures of them and those serial numbers. So, you know, people have stickers and stuff on their laptops. It's great if I am investigating something, and not only do I have the serial number, but like yep, that's clearly the laptop because it's got all these individualized stickers on it.”</p>
Return to Top	CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE INTERACTIVE MAP

HEADLINE	11/17 TPD chief's crime plan right for Tacoma?
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article267940992.html
GIST	<p>The authors of Tacoma Police Chief Avery Moore's violent crime plan have painted a rosy picture of their strategy and called its first three months a success, but the union representing the city's rank-and-file cops alleges top brass is spreading a false narrative and local experts say the plan is fundamentally flawed.</p> <p>“TPD's artificially narrow focus on statistical improvements in crime rates in specific locations misleads the public into believing crime is down citywide. That is far from the truth,” Local 6 Union president Henry Betts, a TPD detective, wrote in a letter to the City Council and department leaders this week calling for increased transparency and dialogue among decision-makers.</p> <p>In addition to concerns about incomplete data, two University of Washington Tacoma criminologists told The News Tribune the plan puts addressing the root causes of violence on the back burner in favor of short-sighted police tactics that could exacerbate historical inequities linked to crime. They also questioned TPD touting the three-phase strategy as customized to the city's unique needs.</p> <p>During interviews with The News Tribune, City Manager Elizabeth Pauli has maintained that the strategy is progressing as planned. City officials did not address criticisms from the police officer union and University of Washington Tacoma faculty in response to a list of questions from reporters.</p> <p>A CRIME PLAN THAT'S 'UNIQUE' FOR TACOMA</p> <p>A review by The News Tribune determined the plan authored by faculty members at the University of Texas at San Antonio is effectively a hand-me-down of what they developed for the Dallas Police Department, Moore's former employer, in 2021. Dallas is about six times bigger than Tacoma by population and land area, and its police department has about 3,100 officers compared to TPD's 118 available to answer to calls.</p>

Emails provided to The News Tribune through public records requests show Moore reached out to the UTSA criminologists in late January – his second week in Tacoma. The researchers then met with city officials in early February. In March, they agreed to a one-year, nearly \$96,000 contract.

The first phase of the plan has been for officers to drive to 16 addresses with high rates of violent street crime — defined as non-family violence aggravated assaults, murders and robberies — at peak times and activate their patrol car lights for 15 minutes, in hopes of deterring potential criminal activity. TPD launched pilot hot-spots patrols in March and officially implemented the tactic in July.

Because the city is short about 40 officers, TPD has largely relied upon officers volunteering to work overtime to cover hot spots, according to Moore. City spokesperson Maria Lee said the city paid nearly \$395,000 through the end of September for hot-spots policing overtime.

Moore has said the two later phases of crime plan would address root causes of crime, though the details remain unclear due to a reliance on collaborations with other city departments and community organizations. Police leaders have declined to estimate the cost when asked publicly by city officials and volunteer committee members.

Phase 2, projected for early next year, calls for blight abatement and disrupting crime networks in select hot spots once TPD garners buy-in from city department heads. Phase 3 focuses on deterring so-called “known offenders” through social programs and increased investigative resources. Moore has suggested deploying a violent crime team could be a part of the final phase.

The city did not solicit bids to develop its violent crime plan, instead relying on Moore’s endorsement to address imminent concerns about rising crime. Pauli, Tacoma’s city manager, told The News Tribune that Dallas data showing a reduction in street violence and reports of crime across the board was promising to Tacoma leaders.

Dallas entered the second year of the plan in May and remains in Phase 2 of three, the Dallas Morning News reported. Recent crime data show the tally of robberies and homicides is up slightly citywide compared to last year, while aggravated assaults are down about 4%.

Dallas paid about \$50,000 for the first contract year, according to documents and emails obtained by The News Tribune. The city of San Antonio was slated to receive a “replica” this fall for more than \$100,000.

Tacoma officials intend to extend the one-year contract with UTSA to continue assisting with the crime plan, which was initially slated for a three-year implementation, according to Lee.

Pauli acknowledged that Tacoma’s plan is similar to the Dallas plan but said the approach differs from TPD’s past efforts to reduce crime.

“It’s academically and data-driven,” Pauli told reporters during an August video call. “That’s what’s unique for us.”

More than half of Tacoma’s published plan document is substantially lifted from the one implemented by the Dallas Police Department, according to an analysis from Copyleaks, an online tool for evaluating plagiarism. Nearly 29% of the text is identical, particularly in sections describing the plan’s prescribed tactics. Another 27% of the text is paraphrased or contains minor changes from Dallas’ plan.

To inform the Tacoma plan, UTSA criminologists conducted two focus groups with 12 people chosen by city officials. Many of the participants spoke about looking beyond law enforcement for public safety solutions and reframing the role of TPD. Moore convened an advisory cabinet with some of the same people for two meetings this spring.

Emails, documents and interviews with two cabinet members suggest the bulk of developing the crime plan was devoted to determining where to place hot-spot patrols.

Two University of Washington Tacoma criminologists told The News Tribune that crime is a nuanced issue and identifying effective solutions requires the expertise of residents who are most impacted by it. They said TPD's crime plan doesn't include enough of that perspective.

"It should be tailored to the needs of the community, not cut-and-pasting something from Dallas. It's really unfortunate, to be honest," said Ken Cruz, a University of Washington Tacoma assistant professor who researches community-based crime prevention. "Where's the voice of the people who are actually affected by this?"

"(The plan) seems out of order and neglectful to really change crime and its reality, rather than perception," said Cruz's colleague Janelle Hawes, who also specializes in data analysis. Recently, she's worked with local police departments on evaluations of their workplace climates and community engagement efforts.

Cruz and Hawes are uniquely positioned to assess TPD's strategy. They and three other UW Tacoma faculty delivered a report on preventing local youth gun violence to city officials in January and presented it to a City Council committee in May. Their proposal, which has implications beyond youth, calls for extensive public engagement up front to spur the development of community-led programs that intervene in violence and counteract the economic desperation that often fuels crime.

"If we truly want to make communities safe, that's what we'll do," said Cruz, the lead author. He added, "It seems as though we're looking to police to solve the larger problems of society, and they're just not equipped to do it."

HOT SPOT POLICING RESULTS 'PAINTS A PRETTY PICTURE'

TPD's crime plan set a dire stage when it was published in July: Violent street crime, which excludes domestic violence and sexual assaults, had nearly doubled in the past 12 months; and the 2022 murder tally of 25 at that point was on pace to eclipse the historic total from 2021. That number is now 39, five more than last year's total, which was the highest in decades.

Earlier this month, the UTSA researchers had good news during a 90-day update to City Council: the average number of monthly violent street crime incidents dropped about 20% citywide and just over 30% in hot spots compared to the preceding 12 months.

Officers went to their assigned hot spots 92% of the time and eight of the locations "cooled" enough for TPD to move on to new ones, according to the UTSA researchers. They said their data showed hot-spot patrols didn't displace violence to surrounding areas; rather, the researchers said numbers around hot spots decreased as they had hoped.

"With something like (hot-spots policing), you will see that change quickly," Hawes, the UW Tacoma professor, told The News Tribune. "But that doesn't mean that trend will then be a longstanding one. That doesn't mean you can count on that reduction to last."

"At the end of the day what hot-spots policing is addressing is where violent crime takes place, but it's not addressing why," said Cruz.

Hawes said she wants to see more of the underlying crime data, particularly because the charts presented to City Council showed the average number of violent crime incidents in hot spots nearly doubled from August to September.

September saw five homicides and more aggravated assault offenses reported than any other month in the past three years; its 95 reported robbery offenses were second only to this February during that period, according to crime data from South Sound 911 published by the city.

The UTSA data “paints a pretty picture, yet I’m not convinced,” Hawes said. “This isn’t necessarily preventing crime. We may be seeing a reduction in reported violent crime in these areas, but that doesn’t mean that they’re not happening still.”

In its letter to city officials this week, the police union pointed to the rate of property crime, frequency of shootings and lagging response times as evidence of the gap between department talking points and the public safety experiences of residents and officers.

Lee, the city spokesperson, wrote in an email that 911 response times saw “minimal reductions” due to hot-spot patrols. She said TPD will continue to monitor response time data.

Except for incidents involving an imminent threat or active violence, TPD data show 911 callers on average wait more than 30 minutes before an officer is dispatched, according to the department’s 2023 budget presentation. Wait times across all call categories grew from last year.

The union specifically critiqued TPD’s recent move to categorize as vandalism some shooting incidents where people aren’t injured.

Lee said TPD accounts for noninjury shootings as a part of its hot-spots patrols.

“The truth is often an uncomfortable reality,” the union letter read. “Hiding behind selective statistics does not change the experience of our community — an experience that is unacceptably riddled with crime.”

Some City Council members have questioned the reliability of local violent crime data because of a growing reluctance to call 911 in Tacoma. Deputy Mayor Catherine Ushka said in July she was concerned TPD’s hot-spot patrols could miss some areas experiencing violence since she’s heard from people who have given up reporting crimes to police. Council member Olgy Diaz raised similar concerns during the 90-day update earlier this month.

“Non-reporting is generally less of a problem with serious violent crime than it is with lesser offenses,” lead UTSA researcher Mike Smith said in response to Ushka. “That’s not to say that it doesn’t exist. We call that the dark figure of crime, that there’s some percentage of shootings, for example, or robberies that go unreported.”

Hawes said the fact that a large amount of crime goes unreported is an inherent weakness of police data.

“Your crime rate comes from where crimes are reported, it doesn’t come from where crimes happened,” she said. Disadvantaged areas tend to see more crimes reported, and “if you’re going off data that is already flawed, that has bias, then your approach can’t be devoid of that same bias.”

Hawes also said the 90-day update on TPD’s crime plan didn’t note the pilot hot-spots patrols that began in March, nor this spring and early summer’s abnormally high violent crime rates.

TPD’s pilot hot-spots program this spring was separate from the UTSA crime plan and consisted of officers patrolling areas identified by the department’s crime analysis unit, according to Lee. Lee said UTSA researchers did not analyze those patrols as a part of its update to the City Council.

“It can be very misleading to just have these numbers without some more context because crime is a very nuanced event. It doesn’t happen in a vacuum,” Hawes said. “Residents want there to be clean solutions, and residents at large aren’t going to need to see, or even want to see, data that contains nuance.”

“There’s not anything here that definitely tells me this is great or this is horrible,” Hawes added.

Deputy police chief Paul Junger told the Community’s Police Advisory Committee in August that the presentation by the UTSA researchers was TPD’s “way of staying transparent” regarding the impact of its plan.

Pauli, the city manager, said a data-driven approach prevents biased evaluations.

“If they were telling me that things were getting better, but the numbers were going up, then I would say, ‘I wonder where your conclusions are coming from.’ But right now, their conclusions are matching the data,” Pauli said.

CRIME PLAN FOCUS ON RACE-NEUTRAL STRATEGIES

Developed in the wake of a national reckoning with race and policing, Moore and the authors of TPD’s crime plan emphasized their strategy is a departure from law enforcement tactics associated with racial stereotyping and over-policing.

“It doesn’t rely on aggressive and divisive practices like stop and frisk that have been used in other places,” Smith, the UTSA researcher, told the City Council in July.

“It doesn’t rely on discretionary practices of the police that have been shown to be problematic in some other places as well.” Rather, the plan relies on crime data, visibility and “repeat offenders,” which Smith said means the plan is race-neutral. The racial makeup of Tacoma’s neighborhoods did not inform TPD’s tactics, according to the published plan.

Cruz, the UW Tacoma criminologist, said TPD’s crime plan doesn’t include enough evidence to support that conclusion.

“I question whether they did their due diligence,” Cruz told The News Tribune. Areas with higher levels of street crime tend to have been harmed by a history of racism, over-policing, housing discrimination and under-investment, according to Cruz. Hot-spot patrols can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where an increased police presence leads to greater criminalization of a community.

“What they’re saying is it’s neutral in their intent, but not necessarily race-neutral in its impact,” Cruz told The News Tribune.

He said UTSA should have included further study of the impact on residents because “if you are focusing on a place, you are focusing on the people in that place.”

Cruz said neighborhoods and suburbs labeled as “safe” have benefited from a greater level of investment, compared to historically disadvantaged communities.

“We have yet to reckon with that,” Cruz said.

While drafting the plan, two UTSA researchers raised questions about the “race-neutral” claim because “some minority groups/areas could be disproportionately exposed” to high visibility policing, according to documents provided to The News Tribune through a public records request.

TPD has declined to disclose the hot-spot locations publicly, citing the safety of officers and the integrity of the plan, but researchers have said a number are near commercial properties, such as strip malls, hotels, and convenience stores.

After the 90-day update presentation, several City Council members asked Moore for more information about the hot spots, such as racial demographics, education levels and whether they are on the city’s equity index, which maps community access to social services or lack thereof.

The Dallas plan did not make the same assertion about race but used arrest rates to counter concerns about over-policing. Arrests increased 6.4% citywide and 2.7% in hot spots during the plan’s first year, the Dallas Morning News reported.

WHAT HAPPENED IN DALLAS?

The story of rising violent crime and Dallas police's response in 2021 mirrors that of Tacoma this year in a number of ways.

In 2021, Dallas hired a charismatic police chief, Eddie Garcia, from outside the state to revitalize a department struggling with a deflated staff, an image problem and a historic uptick in homicides. Within a few months, Garcia announced a modern plan developed with criminologists to tamp down violent crime.

The initial results from hot-spots patrols at 50 addresses were promising in Dallas, and city officials were quick to declare victory. While many of the country's largest cities saw rising numbers and historic homicide tallies in 2021, violent crime in Dallas went down 9% compared to 2020, according to the Dallas Morning News.

"Remaining humble, our city has done a great deal to reverse that" trend in crime, then-Dallas police Maj. Paul Junger, who monitored the plan's effectiveness, told the City Council in December, according to a Dallas Morning News report. Junger is now Moore's deputy police chief in Tacoma.

After the first full year, UTSA researchers said violent street crime, which excludes domestic violence and sexual assaults, dropped 11.5% citywide from May 2021 to May 2022, The Dallas Morning News reported.

Violent street crime in hot spots dropped 10.7%.

Dallas police selected two out of the 50 hot spots to pilot the second phase of its plan, which was focused on disrupting environmental conditions tied to crime, The Dallas Morning News reported. While violence decreased in one hot spot targeted by police and other city departments, such as code enforcement, the other area saw an increase.

In some parts of Dallas, crime appeared to spill out from some targeted hot spots to adjacent areas, according to the Dallas Morning News.

UTSA researchers have said so-called "displacement" is uncommon with hot-spot policing, and that there is evidence the strategy has a sustained effect on areas immediately outside hot spots.

One hurdle for Dallas has been buy-in and collaboration from outside stakeholders. Tacoma officials also have indicated their plan will rely on buy-in from other city departments, community organizations and business owners to succeed. Dallas police announced a plan in March to engage with residents of apartment complexes – which see the largest share of the city's murders, robberies and aggravated assaults – and ask owners to invest in upkeep and security.

Garcia complained in June that some hadn't done so in response to questions about an increase in homicides "Reinvesting in places and people is extremely important," Garcia told the Dallas City Council in September, according to The Dallas Morning News.

"When crime goes up, it's not just a police issue. And when it goes down, it's a collective effort." DOT worker John Spading paints over graffiti sprayed on a bridge pier underneath I-705 in Tacoma in 2017.

Phase 2 of the city's crime plan calls reducing visible disorder associated with crime, like graffiti and open drug use.

TACOMA'S LONG-TERM PLAN – AND ITS CRITIQUES

The second phase of TPD's plan focused on reducing visible disorder associated with crime — such as graffiti, poor lighting, open drug use and homeless encampments — is slated to begin by the end of March, according to city officials. TPD plans to convene and train members of contributing city departments, such as code enforcement, early next year.

That sort of place-based policing strategy often is associated with the controversial broken-windows theory, which draws a direct connection between visible disorder and crime. The UTSA researchers also cite routine activities theory, which posits that crime requires opportunity, a motivated offender and a lack of supervision.

Neither theory as applied by TPD addresses the root causes of crime, according to Hawes and Cruz.

Hawes said in her experience routine activity theory is more associated with property crime than reducing violence. “It’s all about deterring folks from engaging in crime but not addressing the underlying reasons,” Cruz said. “They’re kind of shallow theories.”

The UTSA researchers wrote in their plan that place-based policing is proven to reduce fear of crime, corresponding with TPD’s goal to increase the perception of safety among residents. On the other hand, one study the UTSA researchers cited said increased police intervention in an area can have the opposite effect and increase the probability that people feel unsafe. Moore has said perception will be the toughest battle for TPD, though the crime plan does not suggest how the city would measure success.

“It does seem like Tacoma, this area, definitely has issues with the perception of crime and crime occurrence being pretty far off the realities,” Hawes told The News Tribune. She said she examined recent and historical local crime data for the City Council youth gun violence report and came to the conclusion that the panic about rising overall crime rates during the last few years was part of a false narrative.

“Crime wasn’t experiencing this huge uptick the way people thought it was,” she said. The police union said in its letter to city officials that reducing crime will require fewer restrictions on booking suspects into jail, increased staffing and changes to police reform laws that limit the authority of officers.

“We must be honest that TPD’s crime plan is not the only answer,” the letter said. Cruz and Hawes said the city should prioritize investment in social services and violence intervention programs called for in Phase 3 of the violent crime plan.

They said some regional models already exist. Cruz mentioned local gun violence organizations Tacoma Cease Fire and King County-based Choose 180. Hawes noted Safe Streets, which facilitates youth programming and neighborhood organizing groups. “It’s not like we don’t know what works,” Cruz said.

TPD plans to begin Phase 3 in the next 18 months to two years, according to Lee, the city spokesperson.

Recently retired Safe Streets executive director Priscilla Lisicich said she advocated for TPD to start Phase 3 sooner during Moore’s advisory cabinet meetings. She said the police chief has since recognized how Safe Streets’ efforts resemble the crime plan.

“We were talking about a particular project, and (Moore) looked at me and he said, ‘We’re kind of doing Phase 3, aren’t we?’ ” Lisicich told The News Tribune. “And I said, ‘Yeah, I’m just really glad you said that.’”

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HEADLINE	11/17 L.A. railroad burglaries: 22 arrests
SOURCE	https://ktla.com/news/local-news/22-arrested-in-connection-with-l-a-railroad-burglaries-18-million-in-stolen-merchandise-recovered/
GIST	<p>Officials with the Los Angeles Police Department on Thursday announced that a yearlong investigation of cargo train burglaries netted 22 arrests and \$18 million in recovered merchandise.</p> <p>In January, the Union Pacific Railroad Company reported a 160% nationwide increase in rail thefts, with more than 90 containers compromised every day.</p>

“The Commercial Crimes Division detectives’ investigative efforts resulted in not just countless hours of surveillance, 49 search warrants, but also the recovery of more than \$18 million worth of merchandise stolen from these cargo containers. Those containers were on trains headed to all points across the country,” LAPD Chief Michel Moore said.

Robert Vega, owner of A&A Auto Wrecking, had a front-row seat to the train burglaries.

The railway is right in front of his family-owned business in Lincoln Heights and was often littered with debris from merchandise that was meant to arrive at warehouse facilities around U.S.

Vega said thieves climbed aboard the cargo trains, broke into containers and hundreds of packages with products ranging from family portraits and holiday gifts to more expensive things like medication, COVID-19 tests and personal protective equipment.

Even more concerning were the dozens of guns also stolen from the raided trains.

“It was a joke because these guys are hanging onto the trains while they’re running or they’re stopped. They have tools, they’re opening up the containers, throwing everything out. It was like a free for all,” Vega told KTLA’s Rachel Menitoff.

The 22 people arrested are now facing charges of burglary, cargo theft and receiving stolen property. Officials said they stored the stolen merchandise in their homes, cars and other warehouse facilities, and that they sold items in L.A. County and as far as Arizona.

Authorities also said that four storage locations that contained drugs and assault weapons were shut down.

“So, it gives you a sense of that those allegedly involved in these crimes were involved not just in thefts from these train lines, but much more broadly and intercepting at this moment can solve a lot of crimes in this region,” City Attorney Mike Feuer said.

In cooperation with the railroad company, LAPD said additional fencing, lighting, surveillance and foot patrols have improved the situation.

“So, at night you can hear the cameras go off when someone approaches the tracks... they’ll tell them to get off the tracks,” Vega said. “So, that’s working out pretty good.”

Police said they are still working to identify more people involved in these thefts, but believe they have completely shut down this particular group of thieves.

In a statement to KTLA, Union Pacific said it’s made considerable investments to strengthen security in L.A., to ensure the safety of its employees and customers, and that it’s looking forward to working with law enforcement to see these cases through.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Outcry: Georgia cops beat man in custody
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/footage-black-mans-beating-custody-draws-outrage-state/story?id=93424780
GIST	<p>Security footage that shows a group of police officers in Georgia beating a 41-year-old Black man in custody has drawn community outrage. Civil rights attorney Harry Daniels said the incident is yet another case of wrongdoing by Georgia's Camden County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>The footage from the sheriff's office of the Sept. 3 incident was released by Daniels. It shows Jarrett Hobbs standing in a holding cell when an officer enters, seemingly grabbing Hobbs by the neck. Four more officers come in, one of whom begins to punch Hobbs in the back of the neck before other officers join in the attack.</p>

Hobbs, a resident of North Carolina, had been detained earlier that day for allegedly speeding, driving with a suspended driver's license and possession of a controlled substance. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation announced Wednesday it would begin an independent investigation of the "use of force incident" at the request of Brunswick Judicial Circuit District Attorney Keith Higgins.

Daniels and co-counsel Bakari Sellers announced in August a \$25 million lawsuit against Camden County deputies and Sheriff Jim Proctor over the shooting death of 37-year-old Latoya James while executing a drug-related search warrant in her home in May 2021. The district attorney's office decided not to charge the deputies involved in that shooting, according to ABC affiliate station WJXX in Jacksonville.

"While any loss of life is always tragic, the officers' use of force in this instance was justified to protect their lives," Higgins said in a statement in April on the James case.

"This is not a bad apple, this is a bad apple orchard," Daniels said at a press conference Wednesday.

Hobbs' two sisters and Camden County NAACP President Timothy Bessent, Sr. also attended the press conference. While the sisters declined to comment, Bessent, Sr. spoke on the local NAACP's ongoing efforts to mend community-police relations over the past two years.

"We like to say the NAACP of Camden County believes in the rule of law. We want to support the law enforcement officers and treat everyone with dignity that humans deserve," he said. "The beating of Jarrett Hobbs and other incidents that have come to light show how far the sheriff's office still have to go."

Daniels, Sellers, community members, and Hobbs' family are now calling for the immediate arrest and termination of the officers involved.

"There was absolutely no reasoning, no justification, no cause, no debatable issue, no legal justification to go in that cell with a man sitting there and pummel him," Sellers said at the conference. "[What] they did to him was a criminal act."

According to a statement from Daniels, Hobbs had been "suffering a psychological episode" and had asked to be placed in protective confinement on the day of the incident.

According to Daniels, Hobbs suffered injuries including a chipped tooth and swelling and one of his dreadlocks was also pulled out of his head during the altercation. He says that though Hobbs complained immediately afterwards, he did not receive medical attention and was put in solitary confinement for about two weeks.

It is unclear whether any particular event prompted the incident, but Hobbs was later charged with assault and battery against a police officer.

Hobbs bonded out on all charges and was released from Camden County custody on Sept. 30, court records show. He is now in custody in North Carolina for violating his probation due to his Georgia arrest.

Camden County Sheriff Jim Proctor has ordered an internal investigation, according to a statement from the sheriff's office Monday, more than two months after the incident occurred.

"These investigations limit what can be stated but, I can say that the five employees have been placed on administrative duties that are not in any way associated with law enforcement duties," Camden County Sheriff's Office Capt. Larry Bruce said in a statement to ABC News Thursday. "This was done so the investigators have immediate access to these individuals during the conducting of the inquiry."

The sheriff's office said it will not release the names of the deputies involved until the investigation concludes.

HEADLINE	11/17 Idaho surviving roommates key to probe?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/roommates-home-idaho-college-students-stabbed-death/story?id=93428236
GIST	<p>Two surviving roommates of four University of Idaho students who were found dead in a house near the Moscow, Idaho, campus, could be "key" to the case, according to the state police spokesman, as persons of interest or suspects have yet to be identified.</p> <p>The two surviving female roommates -- who have not been ruled "in or out at suspects" in the fatal stabbings -- are "working and talking with detectives, and they have been cooperative -- very cooperative," Idaho State Police spokesman Aaron Snell told ABC News on Thursday.</p> <p>"Potentially they are witnesses, potentially they are victims," Snell said, adding that the roommates could be "the key to this whole thing."</p> <p>The four students, who were killed early Sunday morning and found hours later, were identified as Ethan Chapin, 20, of Conway, Washington; Madison Mogen, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Xana Kernodle, 20, of Avondale, Arizona; and Kaylee Goncalves, 21, of Rathdrum, Idaho.</p> <p>Two other roommates were home at the time of the crime, and they were not hurt, Moscow Police Chief James Fry said during a news conference Wednesday. It was not a hostage situation, he added.</p> <p>It's believed the victims were killed between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. Sunday, Moscow Mayor Art Bettge told ABC News. The roommates were home when police responded to a call for an unconscious individual at the home about eight hours later, Fry said. The roommates were not the 911 callers, according to Snell.</p> <p>Fry said the four victims were killed with a knife in "an isolated, targeted attack".</p> <p>Snell did not reveal what type of knife was used in the killings but said authorities are going to local businesses to see if anyone recently purchased a fixed-blade knife.</p> <p>Snell described it as "a very complex and in-depth investigation."</p> <p>No one has been cleared in the case, either, Snell said.</p> <p>As for having no suspects or persons of interest nearly a week later, Snell said, "It's very frustrating ... we would have loved to have solved this [immediately.]"</p> <p>Police said they are working to determine the victims' timeline Saturday night.</p> <p>Chapin and Kernodle were at a party on campus while Goncalves and Mogen were at a downtown bar that night, Fry said.</p> <p>Chapin didn't live in the house but was sleeping over with his girlfriend, Kernodle, according to his mother, Stacy Chapin.</p> <p>Goncalves and Mogen had been best friends since childhood and "did everything together," Goncalves' sister, Alivia Goncalves, told ABC News.</p> <p>She said she finds some solace that the friends were together in their final moments.</p> <p>Autopsies from the Latah County Coroner found all of the victims were stabbed to death in a homicide.</p> <p>Although Fry described the attack as "targeted," he said, "We cannot say there is no threat to the community."</p> <p>He urged anyone with information about the victims' whereabouts Saturday night to call the tip line at 208-883-7180.</p>

	<p>As police canvass for information, a direct neighbor of the victims' house told ABC News he has not been interviewed by police.</p> <p>"If anybody does have information, we encourage them to contact us," Snell said.</p> <p>Former FBI agent and ABC News contributor Brad Garrett thinks the surviving roommates are the "key" in the investigation, but he doesn't think they are suspects.</p> <p>"It's a small town. The likelihood that they know who that person was in the house, I think, is reasonable," Garrett said Thursday morning.</p> <p>In terms of the investigation, Garrett said, "police appear to be stymied based on their own comments."</p> <p>For police, Garrett said the next steps are: "You really are going to have to do a complete detail of the party that was prior to whatever was going on between 3 and 4 o'clock at the victim's house. ... Who followed them home? Who has been taking whom? Who have had issues with people? This killer didn't all of a sudden show up at this house -- he knew this house."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 CBP agent fatally shot off Puerto Rico coast
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/us-federal-agents-shot-approaching-smuggling-boat-off/story?id=93476794
GIST	<p>A federal marine agent with U.S. Customs and Border Protection was fatally shot while approaching a suspected smuggling boat off the coast of Puerto Rico on Thursday morning, officials said.</p> <p>Three marine agents were shot at while they approached the vessel, and the agents returned fire at the suspects' boat, according to a statement from CBP.</p> <p>The agents "suffered various gunshot injuries" in the shootout, which was about 14 miles off the coast of Cabo Rojo, and were airlifted to hospitals, according to the statement. One agent died, but the conditions of the other two were not clear.</p> <p>One of the two people on the suspected smuggling vessel died at the scene and the other was arrested, Customs and Border Protection said.</p> <p>Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said at a congressional hearing Thursday that he was briefed on the shooting.</p> <p>"The difficulty of this job cannot be compared to the difficulty that our front-line personnel face every day," Mayorkas said, alluding to his own role.</p> <p>Later Thursday morning, another Marine Interdiction crew intercepted another vessel that had contraband and firearms, according to Customs and Border Protection. Both people on board -- two U.S. citizens -- were arrested, the agency said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 Dutch court convicts 3 in MH17 downing
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/17/mh17-verdict-conviction-flight/
GIST	<p>AMSTERDAM — A Dutch court on Thursday convicted two Russians and a Ukrainian of murder in the downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight over eastern Ukraine in 2014, an attack that killed all 298 passengers and crew on board.</p> <p>The conviction of the defendants — two former Russian security service officers and a Ukrainian national who commanded pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region — implicates the Russian</p>

government. Moscow has long denied responsibility for the destruction of the jetliner and refused to extradite the defendants or cooperate with investigators. A third Russian defendant was acquitted.

The defendants did not attend the trial and are not in custody. Those convicted are Igor Girkin, a former colonel of the FSB, Russia's security service, who later served as defense minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic; Sergey Dubinsky, a former officer of the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency; and Leonid Kharchenko, a Ukrainian commander of separatist forces in Donbas.

They were sentenced to life in prison, though they may never be captured.

The fourth defendant, Oleg Pulatov, who served in a special unit of the GRU, was acquitted for lack of evidence. Pulatov was the only defendant who sent lawyers to defend him during the trial, and he had previously asked the court for acquittal, saying he played no part in the incident.

The verdict followed a years-long investigation into who fired a Buk surface-to-air missile that hit the Boeing 777 flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on July 17, 2014, leaving bodies and wreckage scattered across fields in eastern Ukraine.

The incident occurred during fighting between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces in an area where several Ukrainian military jets were shot down in the weeks preceding the destruction of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.

Russia has long maintained that it was not a party to the conflict that unfolded in Donbas in 2014 and that it did not control pro-Russian fighters in Donetsk, where the four defendants held senior positions as part of the separatist militias.

The court, however, determined that Moscow financed and armed the separatist forces in Donetsk and generally controlled the breakaway region and its authorities.

The court also found that the Buk launch was intentional but the defendants most likely thought they were firing at a military aircraft.

"The verdict cannot bring back those who died," presiding Judge Hendrik Steenhuis said. "But clarity has been provided on who is to blame."

Here's what we know about the four suspects charged with downing Flight MH17

After the verdict was announced, victims' family members cried and hugged each other.

"This is a good and balanced verdict, in which three people got the highest possible punishment and the role of Russia in this was confirmed," said Piet Ploeg, who lost his brother, sister-in-law and nephew. "I feel relief as justice has been served."

"We were applauding, we were happy that finally, after eight years, we could hear the truth," said Thomas Schansman, whose 19-year-old son Quinn was on the plane. "There are many more people who could be behind bars for this but what I want now is for Putin and the Russian government to acknowledge their responsibility."

The Kremlin not only denied involvement but sought to smear the investigation as politically biased. It promoted various explanations for how the plane was shot down, from blaming the Ukrainian government to dismissing evidence in the case as fabricated.

In Russia's first official comment on the verdict, the Foreign Ministry dismissed the decision as a "political order."

Dutch investigators went to great lengths to debunk Moscow's claims, publishing a detailed timeline of the strike and laying out the role the defendants played in delivering the missile system to the launch location in Pervomaiskyi and the subsequent downing of the plane.

Investigators in downing of jet over Ukraine charge 4 suspects with ties to Russian intelligence, pro-Moscow militia

Many family members of the Flight 17 victims have suggested that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine this year might have been averted had the international community pushed back harder against Moscow in the years after the plane was shot down.

"Despite evidence to the contrary, the West was happy to accept the idea that separatist groups in Ukraine weren't just proxies for the Russian Federation, so they could turn a blind eye to Russian aggression," said Eliot Higgins, the founder of Bellingcat, which linked the Buk missile system to Russia's 53rd Antiaircraft Missile Brigade and shared its findings with the Dutch investigators.

Judges sit in the courtroom as the Dutch court announces its ruling in the Flight 17 trial of three Russians and a Ukrainian in the Netherlands on Thursday. (Piroshka Van De Wouw/Reuters)
Higgins added: "Had the West stood up to Russian aggression in 2014, we may have avoided the situation we're in today."

Two days before the verdict, a missile landed in a Polish village, near the Ukrainian border, killing two men. Warsaw said it was likely a stray Ukrainian air defense missile, but the incident was yet another example of Russia's aggression having deadly consequences for innocent bystanders.

Girkin, who served as a commander of Kremlin-backed separatist forces in Donetsk, once boasted that he had "pulled the trigger of war" in Ukraine. For years he lived safely in Russia, but he recently dropped out of sight in Moscow and reportedly returned last month to the front line in Ukraine.

Girkin is believed to be the most senior military officer who was in direct contact with Moscow at the time the plane was shot down, and he allegedly helped transport the Buk missile system. He has previously said he felt "a moral responsibility" for the mass death of passengers but denied playing a direct role.

In mid-October, Girkin wrote on his popular Telegram blog that he had joined the "active army" once again. Girkin often uses the blog as a platform to fiercely criticize Russia's military strategy in Ukraine. His wife, Myroslava Reginska, shared a photo of Girkin, who also goes by the nom de guerre Igor Strelkov, wearing a military uniform.

Following reports that Girkin had returned to the front, Ukrainians launched a crowdfunding campaign to collect a \$100,000 bounty for his capture.

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HEADLINE	11/17 Wrong-way driver plows into police recruits
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/recruits-la-sheriffs-office-struck-car/story?id=93410197
GIST	<p>A man driving the wrong way who plowed into dozens of police recruits who were out for a run in Los Angeles County early Wednesday has now been arrested, officials said.</p> <p>The driver, 22-year-old Nicholas Gutierrez, has been arrested for suspicion of attempted murder on a peace officer, the sheriff's department said on Thursday.</p> <p>About 75 recruits were on the run with 25 of them suffering injuries in the crash. The group was mostly Los Angeles Sheriff's Department recruits, but also included others from nearby police departments, including Pasadena and Glendale.</p> <p>"It looked like an airplane wreck, there were so many bodies scattered everywhere," LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said at a news conference Wednesday.</p>

Five of the recruits were critically hurt, four suffered moderate injuries and 16 have minor injuries, officials said at a news conference.

Injuries included head trauma, loss of limb and broken bones, officials said. At least one victim was on a ventilator, the sheriff said.

Gutierrez suffered minor injuries, Los Angeles County Fire Capt. Sheila Kelliher said Wednesday.

The cause of the crash is unknown. The California Highway Patrol said it'll investigate whether the crash was intentional or the result of distracted driving or driving under the influence.

The charge of attempted murder on a peace officer was based on statements made by recruits and other witnesses, including that the car seemed to be accelerating as it went into the group, sources leading the investigation told ABC News. Interviews are ongoing, the sources said.

Villanueva said Gutierrez blew a 0.0 on a Breathalyzer test.

"It looks like it's an accident, a horrific accident," Villanueva said.

The recruits were running on a routine route in Whittier at the time of the crash, which took place around 6:29 a.m. Wednesday, while it was still dark out, officials said.

"Road guards" wearing reflective vests ran on the outside of the recruits, officials said.

The sheriff's office also had two patrol cars escorting the runners.

The accident took place just outside of a fire station, so firefighters immediately raced to the scene, officials said.

Some recruits estimated the car was going about 30 mph, officials said.

"It is hard to see, because these young people are getting ready to go put themselves in the line of danger in their career. And who knows that while you're training to do that you are actually in harm's way," Kelliher said at a news conference. "So my heart goes out to all of them as they pursue this career. I hope that they all have speedy recoveries."

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